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Product Information Number 98

PC GAMER
VOLUME 4 • NUMBER 10 • OCTOBER 1997

Cover Story

Quake II

98

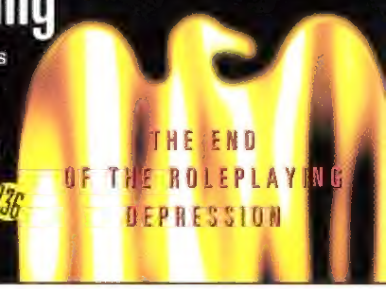
A year after its release, *Quake* is still one of the hottest games on the planet, and we're here to say you ain't seen nothin' yet. *Quake II* is on its way, and we've stormed the offices of id Software to bring you the biggest, best coverage *anywhere*. From the sublime to the downright shocking, we've got 14 pages of info, interviews, and screenshots you'll only find here!

Features

Phoenix Rising

Think PC roleplaying games are dead? Think again. We take a look at the long history of computer RPGs and unveil eight new games that promise to help the genre rise from the flames.

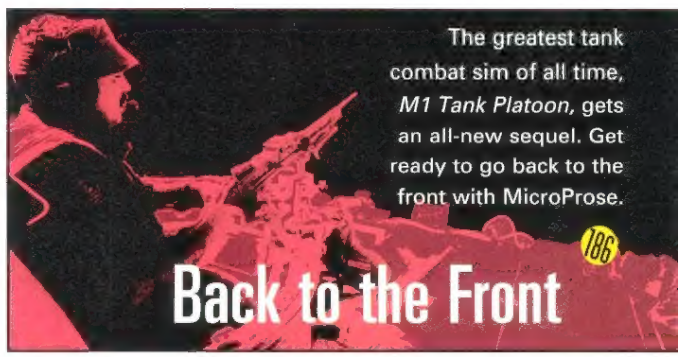
136



Resolution and Hyperspace

172

The best-selling space opera returns to its roots, trading Hollywood flash for improved gameplay, groundbreaking graphics — and even multiplayer action!



Back to the Front

186

The greatest tank combat sim of all time, *M1 Tank Platoon*, gets an all-new sequel. Get ready to go back to the front with MicroProse.

Scoops

50 Guardians: Agents of Justice

Finally — superheroes on your PC in MicroProse's *X-COM*-style strategy game!

44 Half-Life

Sierra joins the first-person fray with a futuristic shoot-'em-up based on *Quake* technology.

54 M.A.X. 2

The sleeper strategy hit from Interplay gets real-time action and new alien races.

60 Heavy Gear

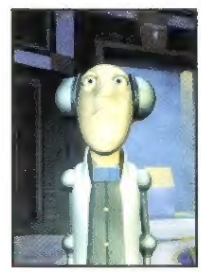
Activision's MechWarrior experts bring us 'bot-bashing in a whole new universe.

64 Riven

How do you follow the top-selling adventure game ever?

68 Starship Titanic

The creator of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* brings us a hilarious new adventure.



Hardware

267 **The Hard Stuff**

From joysticks to speakers to advice from the experts, it's more of our uncompromising, in-depth coverage of gadgets for the gamer who wants it all.

Reviews

258 Ardennes Offensive
210 Atomic Bomberman
211 Carmageddon
214 Betrayal in Antara
224 Extreme Assault
231 Haunted Casino
206 iF-22
240 Links LS 98
244 Meat Puppet
241 Pro Pinball: Timeshock!
230 Scrabble
254 The Space Bar
220 Twinsen's Odyssey
234 Warbirds
248 Warlords III
202 X-COM: Apocalypse

Disc Pages

That silver disc is no drink coaster — stick it in your CD-ROM drive and see what happens!

8

Departments

78 **Eyewitness**
Activision buys *Hexen II* creators; EA signs Bullfrog founder; Layoffs at Engage; Sega cancels 3Dfx console; and more breaking news from your favorite industry and ours.

305 **Extended Play** — T. Liam McDonald
Add-ons for *Heroes of Might and Magic II* and *Lords of the Realm II* bring even more fun to two terrific strategy games. Plus: the latest game patches and upgrades you'll find on *The CD*.

311 **The Learning Game** — Heidi E. H. Aycock
Looking back on her first trip to the Electronic Entertainment Expo, Heidi looks at trends in educational gaming — both good and bad.

317 **Multi-Play** — Jason Bates
Internet gaming looked better than ever at this year's E3, and our man Jason has the highlights.

320 **Alternate Lives** — Michael Wolf
If computer roleplaying games are coming out of their doldrums, isn't it time for some improvements in graphic adventures, too?

323 **The Desktop General** — William R. Trotter
TalonSoft retires its Battleground series of games and introduces an all-new system for *East Front*, the first in the Campaign Series.

324 **Sim Column** — Dan Bennett
For a while, it seemed like Thrustmaster was standing still as other controller companies grew — but they've begun making some interesting changes.

332 **Strategy Central**
An extra-large helping of hints and tips, including strategies for *688(I) Hunter/Killer*, *iF-22*, *X-COM: Apocalypse*, *Ecstatica II*, and more!

375 **Letters**
You write 'em, we read 'em; if we don't toss 'em, we print 'em.

384 **Next Issue**
You know us well enough to know we've got yet another big-time exclusive in store for you next month, but you'll have to flip to the back of the book to find out what it is.

337 **Subscription/Customer Service Information**
Why are you reading this at a magazine rack? There's a better way: Subscribe!

PC Gamer (ISSN 1080-4471) is published monthly by Imagine Publishing, Inc., 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005. Periodicals Class postage paid at Brisbane, CA, and additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by the Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: One year (12 issues) US: $39.90. Canada: $53.90. Foreign: $63.90. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #1282205681). Outside US and Canada: Add $2.00 per issue. For customer service, write PC Gamer, Attn: Customer Service, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005, call (415) 468-2500. **Postmaster** please send change of address to: *PC Gamer*, P.O. Box 51195, Boulder, CO 80322-1195. Corporate, advertising sales, circulation, editorial and production offices: 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005. Phone: (415) 468-4684. Fax: (415) 468-4686. Editorial product information should be addressed to: Editor, *PC Gamer*, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005. Overnight delivery parcels should be addressed to *PC Gamer*, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Imagine Publishing, Inc., also publishes *Game Players*, *Next Generation*, *Boot*, *MacAddict*, *The Net*, and *PlayStation Magazine*.

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Standard Mail enclosed in the following editions: B, B1, B2, B3, C, C1, C2.

Bulk Rate
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No Such Thing As Too Much Quake...

***Fourteen pages* dedicated to a preview of one game? More than 70 screenshots? Have we gone insane? A few months ago we might have thought so ourselves — but that was before we saw *Quake II* in action for the first time. When Todd Vaughn and Colin Williamson visited id Software this month (they were the only journalists invited to Texas for a hands-on preview), they were blown away by what they saw. *Quake II* is not what many of us expected — it's a whole, whole lot more.**

In preparation for this imminent second coming, the *PC Gamer* team has been DeathMatching each other into oblivion with the original *Quake* — between Todd's pinpoint mouse accuracy, Jason's sneakiness, my merciless killer instincts, and Joe's accomplished camping skills, we've fast developed into a clan to be reckoned with.

We're still excited about the other 3D shooters to come — *Daikatana*, *Prey*, *Half-Life*, and *SiN* particularly — and the genre as a whole is going through a healthy rebirth, but it's difficult to imagine anything seriously standing up to *Quake II* this holiday season.

But why take my word for it? Read all about it for yourself in our exclusive story this month — that's what those fourteen pages are there for, after all...

Gary Whitta, Editor-in-Chief

BEAUTY VS BEAST

Modern supercars battle the power of the past!

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- '69 Chevrolet® Camaro® ZL1
- '70 Plymouth® Hemi Cuda

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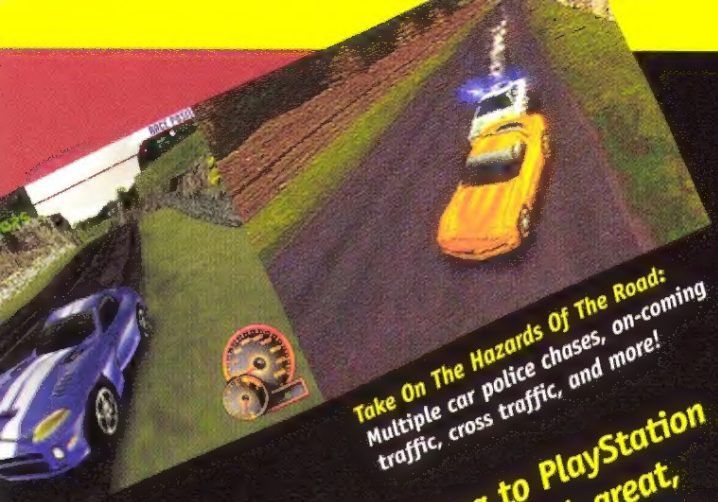

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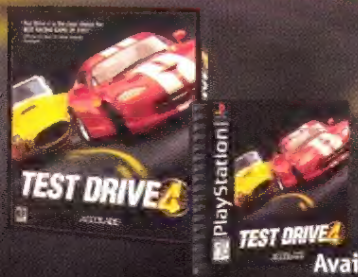

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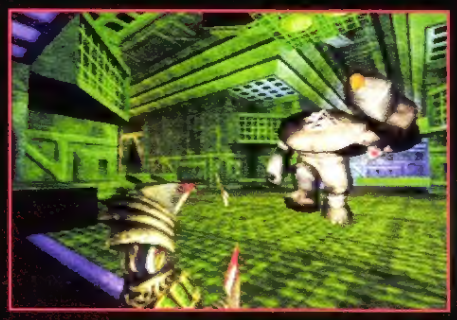

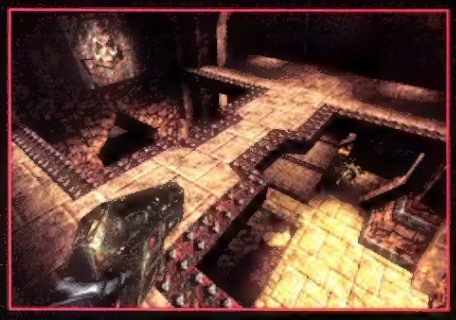

Your ship has crash landed on an unknown planet.

Look around. Crystal clear water shimmers. Shadows shift. Alien architecture fades into the horizon. Darkness falls. Walkways glow. Godless temples beckon. You are afraid. You are in the real world...but it is like no world you have ever known. You are an uninvited guest in the fastest, sleekest, most beautiful 3D world ever created. Live it. Breathe it. Survive it.

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Product Information Number 155

A Whole Lot of Quakin' Going On

Not only do we have the usual slew of great game demos on *The CD* this month (*X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, *Uprising*, and *Warlords III*, to name just a few), but, thanks to some help from the *Quake*-heads at Stomped.Com, we've got something fans of *Quake* will love — more add-ons, mods, and conversions than you can shake a rocket launcher at!

Of course, the return of *Quake*-mania to our offices has meant that the number of deathmatches going on at any one time has nearly tripled. Everything was going splendidly until the newest member of the *PCG* team, webmaster Michael "Sandmoose" Luton, joined in. After he annihilated everyone on the team — twice — we decided his time would be better spent working on our web page.

From this screen, you can go straight to the demos, the main menu, or click the Start Here button to view the intro.

Entering Paradise

Your exploration begins with a panoramic view of Coconut Monkey's Island. You can move the mouse around the screen to scroll left or right. When your mouse scrolls over an area that contains information, it will turn into an arrow. Just click on the highlighted site to enter.

There are also control buttons on the bottom of the screen that will take you directly to any one of the many usable sites. The control buttons can be clicked on to enter and exit each site.

Quick Start for The CD

1. Insert the CD.
2. From the Windows RUN option (found under the File Menu in Windows 3.1 or Start Menu under Windows 95) type X:START31.EXE or X:START95.EXE, depending on your version of Windows (where X is the letter of your CD-ROM drive).
3. This will run *The CD*.

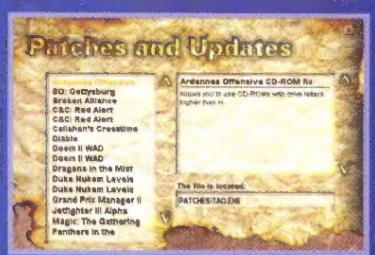
FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

REVIEWS INDEX

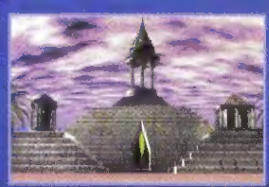
The Reviews Index contains info on every review we've ever run, including the Highs, Lows, and Bottom Line. The arrows will scroll through the index, and there's a search button to help you find any review by title.

PATCHES

The Patches & Updates section shows a description and location for each of the patches on *The CD*, as well as all of the add-on levels we've included for *Quake*, *WarCraft II*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, and *Doom II*.



TECH SUPPORT



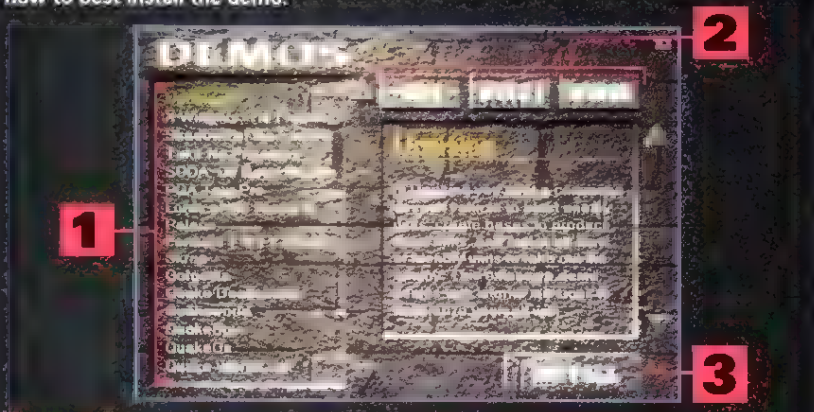
Our Technical Support database includes contact information for many game companies. The arrows will let you scroll through the selections, plus there's a search button so you can find any company by name.

INTERNET

At the Internet Hut, you can install any of the online services on *The CD*. You can also select your web browser to connect to the Internet — very handy for getting online info if you have problems with a demo.

PLAYING THE DEMOS

This is where you go to install the many demos on *The CD*. When you first enter this screen, a list of all the demos will appear in the left column. 1 Click on the DOS, WIN 3.1, and WIN 95 buttons. 2 This will break the demos down into their respective categories. The INSTALL button 3 will allow you to install a demo and, if applicable, connect to that company's web site (you'll have to first select your browser from the Internet Hut). Occasionally, some of these demos won't install from our front end. In these cases, a message will appear instructing you on how to best install the demo.



System Requirements

486/33; 4MB RAM; Mouse

NOTE: These requirements are for loading our front-end program only. Each game demo will have its own additional requirements, so be sure to read them carefully.

Attention Win95 Users

The *PC Gamer* front end should work fine in Windows. To install and run DOS games, you will need to reboot into a DOS session.

Free Demos!

Newsstand buyers have the choice of purchasing either the CD-ROM Edition of *PC Gamer* for $7.99, or *PC Gamer* without a CD-ROM for $3.99. If you purchase the edition without a disc, you can still get free game demos because all *PC Gamer* readers have the opportunity to get demos and other goodies in a couple of different ways:

1. You can download demos and check out *PC Gamer*'s World Wide Web site at *www.pcgamer.com* on the Internet. Our Web site also features a special Strategy Plus section, links to other hot Web pages, and daily gaming news.

2. You can call our Customer Service department at (415) 468-2500 (between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. PST) to have *The CD* mailed to you for only $7.95 shipping and handling.

Disc Editors' Note

Technical support for the PC Gamer CD can be found online at *http://support.imagine-inc.com*. You will also find a CD FAQ (Frequently-Asked-Questions list) on our web site at *www.pcgamer.com*. If you have any suggestions or comments for the CD, write us at: PC Gamer CD Editors, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005.

CONTENTS / MANUAL INSTALLATION COMMANDS

Installation Shortcuts

In the event our front end doesn't load or run properly on your machine, you can still install each demo, bypassing our front end altogether.

To manually install a demo, take a look at the Command Box located to the right. This box contains a list of demos along with their directories and installation commands.

To get up and running using the Command Box, first switch to your CD-ROM drive and change to the appropriate directory by typing CD\DIRECTORY, where DIRECTORY is the one listed in the Command Table next to the game you're trying to install. Once in the right directory, type the Install Command, then press Enter.

For example, to install the *Uprising* demo, at the DOS Prompt, type "CD\X" where X is the name of your CD drive. Then type "CD\UPRISING". Then type UPRISING.EXE and press Enter. The demo of *Uprising* will then be installed on your computer. If you're running Windows 95 or Windows 3.1, you can instead use the File Manager or Explorer to find the appropriate directory on *The CD*, and then double-click on the installation command for a Windows-based demo.

For help with our DOS demos, we've added a menu system that will install them for you. Simply switch to your CD-ROM drive and type "MENU". It's a simple as that.

Demo	Directory	Install Command	Page	OS
Quake Patches & Add-Ons	Various	Various	10	Various
Uprising	\UPRISING	UPRISING.EXE	13	WIN95
X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter	\XVTDEMO	XVTDEMO.EXE	14	WIN95
Golgotha	\GOLGOTHA	GOLGDEMO.EXE	17	WIN95
Take No Prisoners	\TNPDEMO	SETUP.EXE	18	WIN95
SODA: Off-Road Racing	\SODA	SETUP.EXE	22	WIN95
Warlords III	\WARLORDS	SETUP.EXE	23	WIN95
PGA Tour Pro	\PGADEMO	PGADEMO.EXE	27	WIN95
Extreme Assault	\XDEMO	INSTALL.BAT	29	DOS
Formula 1	\F1DEMO	F1WIN.EXE	31	WIN95
SandWarriors	\SWDEMO	INSTALL.EXE	32	DOS
XCAR 3Dfx Version	\XCARDEMO\FXDEMO (3Dfx) \XCARDEMO\SOFTDEMO (Software)	INSTALL.BAT	32	DOS/WIN95
Lords of the Realm II	\REALM	SETUP.EXE	33	WIN95
Skrap	\SKRAP	SKRAPSW.EXE	33	WIN95
Shadows of the Empire	\SHADOWS	SHADOWS.EXE	34	WIN95
Palace	\PALACE	16PAL_21.EXE & 32SER_30.EXE	34	WIN31/95
MindSpring	\MSPRING	SETUP.EXE	36	
EarthLink	\EARTHL\3DAY\TA *OR* 14DAY\TA	SETUP.EXE	36	WIN31/95
America Online	\AOL	SETUP.EXE	36	WIN31/95
Patches	\PATCHES			
Doom 2 WADs	\DOOM2			
Duke Nukem 3D MAPs	\DUKE3D			
C&C: Red Alert MPRs	\C&C			
Warcraft 2 PUDs	\WAR2			

Quake Patches and Add-Ons

Boy, have we got something special for you! Rather than putting just a few add-on levels for *Quake* on this month's CD, we've decided to go all out in honor of our *Quake II* feature. You'll find the best of the best here, from the original shareware version of *Quake* to some of the best deathmatch levels in existence to demos of some of the hottest level editors out there.

Many thanks go to the guys at Stomped for helping us put together this wonderful collection of *Quake* goodies. Check out their web site at *www.stomped.com* for the latest on *Quake*, *Quake II*, and games using the *Quake* engine. You'll also find a whole slew of other patches, add-ons, and levels to make *Quake* the best first-person shooter the world has ever seen.

Quake Shareware

Company: id Software
Install: \QUAKESW\INSTALL.BAT

This is where it all began. Install the shareware version of *Quake*, and you'll be hooked for life — or at least until *Quake II* comes out. Containing the first episode of the full game, the shareware gives you eight levels to blast your way through, with eight powerful weapons, and more monsters than you'd care to face in a dark alley. (To use any of the other add-ons we have on *The CD* this month, of course, you'll need to have the full registered version.)

QuakeWorld

Company: id Software
URL: qwcentral.stomped.com
Install: \QWORLD\QW0613.EXE

With id Software's *QuakeWorld*, you'll never again have to search for people to play *Quake* with. Just install it and use the versatile *QuakeSpy* to find the fastest Internet server near you, and you'll be hunting human prey in no time. All you need is a TCP/IP connection to the Internet and a fast modem; *QuakeWorld* will do the rest.

QuakeSpy

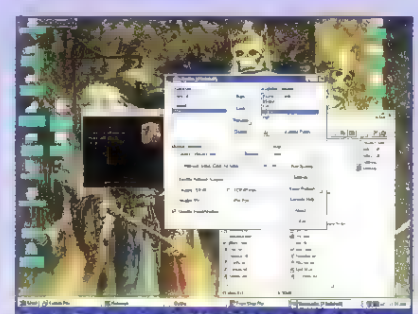
Company: Critical Mass Communications
URL: www.quakespy.com
Install: \QUAKESPY\QSPY521.EXE

QuakeSpy will find the servers with the least amount of latency for your location, and give you a smooth, exciting game of *Quake* every time. Using this in conjunction with *QuakeWorld* will make your multi-player games of *Quake* faster and more exciting than ever.

QuakeOn

Creator: Brian Kelly
URL: quakeon.stomped.com
Install: \QUAKEON\QON_096I.EXE

QuakeOn is a Windows 95 front-end for *Quake* that will simplify your options and configure your own playing style. And by putting it on your task bar, you can launch into a much-needed game at a moment's notice!



QuakeOn is a simple Win 95 interface that frees you from those complicated console commands

Deathmatch Maker

Company: Virtus Corp.
URL: www.deathmatchmaker.com
Install: \QDMDEMO\DEATHMAT.EXE

With this Windows 95-based level editor from the creators of Virtus Walkthrough, you can quickly and easily create your own *Quake* maps for yourself and your friends. This demo version of *Deathmatch Maker* won't let you save the levels you create, but you can build to your heart's content.

WorldCraft

Creator: Ben Morris
URL: www.gamecraft.com
Install: \QWCRAFT\SETUP.EXE

One of the more popular level creators, *WorldCraft* can help you make your own killer levels for *Quake*. The process of creating a map is very different from *DeathMatch Maker*, so give both a shot to see what style suits you best.

All in 19:49

Install: \QMOVIE\AL_1949.DEM

This movie has to be seen to be believed. Imagine finishing all of *Quake* — all four episodes — in only 19 minutes and 49 seconds. Don't believe it? Copy the file ALL_1949.DEM from the \QMOVIE directory on *The CD* to the \QUAKE\ID1 directory on your hard drive. Start *Quake*, pull down the console, and type "playdemo all_1949" to see something that will blow your mind. We've watched it ten times, and we still don't believe it.

DeathPack

Creators: American McGee/Christian Antkow
Install: \QUAKE\DEATHP~1.ZIP

These two maps, DEATH32C.BSP and BASE32B.BSP are, to put it simply, huge. These levels are specifically designed for 32-player deathmatches, so you're not going to see any monsters wandering around in them. You'll also have to use *QuakeWorld* to get as many as 32 players in the game at once.

The Ranger Base

Creator: Alex "[R2]Hobbit" Manilov of the Ranger Clan
Install: \QUAKE\RANBASE.ZIP
When it comes to deathmatch levels, this is one of the best. With lots of interesting architecture to suit every style of play — including you campers — you'll find yourself fried if you let down your guard for a second. There aren't a lot of power-ups, either, so easy kills with quad-power won't cut it here.

Beyond Belief

Creator: Matthias Worch
URL: www.geocities.com/Hollywood/7766/bbelief.htm
Install: \QUAKEBB\BBELIEF.ZIP
Beyond Belief is a complete episode for *Quake*, with great architecture and some excellent logic behind its design. It's one of the most popular collections available, and you'll see why as soon as you start to wind your way through its treacherous passages.

The Vigil

Creator: Wright Bagwell
URL: terraforma.stomped.com
Install: \QUAKE\VIGIL.ZIP
After your friend's death, monsters start to appear to pillage his grave. You need to protect his memory by fighting off the creatures that would desecrate his remains, but there's limited ammo and a lot of fiends to fight off. This is a strategic map that makes you think before you press the fire button.

Future vs. Fantasy Quake

Company: FreeForm Interactive
URL: fvf.warzone.com
Install: \QUAKEFVF\FVF3.ZIP

From the Ninja to Cyborg Camper, you'll get throwing daggers, sniper rifles, and even *Doom*'s BFG 9000 in this total conversion! There are more than 50 new weapons and skills. The shareware version lets you play with the modifications on all the normal *Quake* levels, but the full version will contain even more modifications and its own maps

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www.microsoft.com/games/closecombat

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Uprising

Win95

Company: 3DO Studio
Tech Support: www.3do.com/uprising
Category: Action/Strategy
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 104MB hard-drive space; VGA; Mouse
Install: \UPRISING\UPRISING.EXE

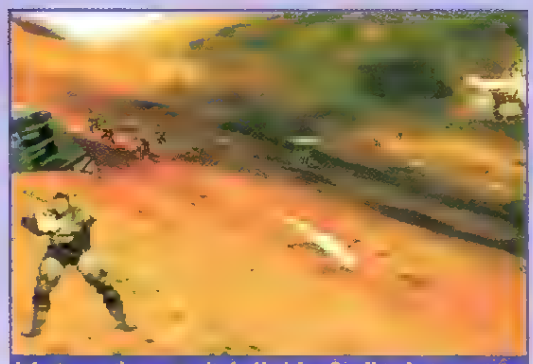
With the legions of copycat real-time strategy games and first-person shooters on the market today, it's refreshing to see a game that combines the best elements of both genres in a way that actually works. That's exactly what 3DO has done with *Uprising*. You command a Wraith tank, a powerful, moving fortress. By building citadels and other facilities (like power stations), you can bring infantry, tanks, and air support into your battle. Just like in any wargame, your goal is to survive and win.

The demo contains three training missions and one full mission from the complete game. You'll learn how to build citadels and call in troops as needed. It's strongly recommended that you play through the detailed and friendly training missions — the game can get rather complex, and trying to figure your way through it with artillery flying every which way isn't the best way to do things.

As you pilot your Wraith into the thick of the fight, you'll press function keys to call in your troops. Press the up and down arrow keys to move forward and back, respectively, and the side keys to slide left and right. Moving the mouse will control your aim. Press the right mouse button to fire secondary weapons, and the left mouse button to fire primary weapons. When your citadel comes under attack, press the F12 key to jump back to the turret at the top of your citadel to defend your base. When you're ready to pilot your Wraith again, just hit Escape. For more commands, take a look at the control keys listed here.

The training missions contain a voice-over instructor telling you what to do. Listen very carefully to his instructions, because once you start playing the full mission, you're going to need every bit of wisdom he imparts. The full mission will pit you against two enemies — one that's already established in the world, and one who's doing the same thing you are: planting citadels and trying to gain a foothold. Both opponents are tough to beat, and the only way you can do it is by taking over more and more bases. You'll need the power the new bases supply, as well as the additional troops.

Also be on the lookout for power-ups scattered throughout the countryside. Run over them in your Wraith, and you'll get useful things like a weapons refill or a free call-in for selected units. You start the game with five Wraiths to play with — if you get blown up, just hit the spacebar to jump into a new Wraith at the nearest citadel.



Infantry are the core units in *Uprising*. Small and maneuverable, they're about the only units that can take out an enemy structure, and they're relatively cheap. They don't last long during a pitched battle, though.

CONTROL KEYS

Wraith Forward/Back	↑ ↓
Wraith Strafe Left/Right	← →
Controls View	Mouse
Primary Weapon	Left click
Secondary Weapon	Right click
Calls in Citadel (WRAITH MUST BE IN THE CLAIM SQUARE OF A COMMAND BUNKER)	F9
Command nearest Citadel (CYCLES THROUGH MULTIPLE CITADELS)	F12
Deploys Infantry (MUST HAVE FACTORY)	F1
Deploys Tank (MUST HAVE FACTORY)	F2
Deploys AAV Gunship (MUST HAVE FACTORY)	F3
Deploys Bomber (MUST HAVE FACTORY)	F4
Deploys Gun Turret (ONLY NEAR CLAIMED CITADEL)	F5
Deploys SAM Site (ONLY NEAR CLAIMED CITADEL)	F6
Toggles Wraith HUD	F11
Satellite Map	O
Recalls deployed unit (UNIT MUST BE TARGETED)	Backspace
Secondary Weapon Menu	Enter
Deploy Unit Menu	Shift
Fixes Wraith (WRAITH MUST BE IN THE CLAIM SQUARE OF A COMMAND BUNKER)	F

You need to keep your Wraith in one piece while battling enemy units.

In the training mission, you have two flights of X-Wings to take out this Star Destroyer. Be sure to target the important systems first.

The dogfights are tough, but if you use your missiles wisely, you stand a chance of coming out on top.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

Company: LucasArts
Tech Support: (415) 507-4545
Category: Action
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 12MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse; Joystick
Install: \XVTDEMO\XVTDEMO.EXE

You've seen the movies. You've bought the action figures. You've played the games. You may have even followed the controversy regarding this game on the Internet. Now it's time to try *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* for yourself and test your piloting skills against the best of the best — other human pilots.

One of the most eagerly awaited games of this year, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* pits as many as eight pilots against each other, either in combat missions or just-plain-dogfights. This demo lets you try out one normal mission — in which the Rebel forces have to take out a Star Destroyer with a flight of X-Wings — and one head-to-head dogfight. The demo supports multi player, of course, so we highly recommend you find some friends to fly against

The control keys here will help you control your star fighter during battle, so examine them closely and keep them handy when you start Be sure to change your speed rapidly — because of the physics of moving objects, you'll turn much faster at slower speeds For most fighters, you get the most maneuverability when you're at 1/3 power, so you'll want to press the [key to line up behind the more agile fighters. Also, the ships you'll pilot can match speeds with the current target — press Enter to bring your speed up and stay on the target's tail, but if it starts coming around, be sure to jump back to 1/3 to keep your bead on it.

The full version of the game contains many more missions to fly, and you can choose to fly any of the available ships. The demo puts you in a TIE Interceptor or an X-Wing, but in the full game you can also fly the A-Wing, Y-Wing, and Z 95 Headhunter on the Rebels' side, and the TIE Fighter, TIE Bomber, TIE Advanced, and Assault Gunboat for the glorious Empire.

You can play the game over a local-area network (LAN) or over the Internet via a TCP/IP connection. LucasArts has also set up a link to Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone (*www.rebelhq.com*), where you can match up and play with players all over the world (provided you have the full version of the game, of course). You can also play one-on-one with a direct serial connection or over the modem.

SPECIAL NOTE: Unlike some flight simulators, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* requires a joystick. If you don't have a joystick, you won't be able to start the game.

CONTROL KEYS

Beam weapon	B
Fire countermeasure	C
Target nearest warhead	I
Quit mission	Q
Target nearest fighter	R
Cycle shield settings	S
Next target	T
Cycle weapon settings	W
Cycle firing settings	X
Eject	Alt + E
Pause game	Alt + P
Adjust beam recharge rate	F8
Adjust laser recharge rate	F9
Adjust shield recharge rate	F10
Confirm critical orders	
Full throttle	Backspace
Match targeted craft speed	Return
Increase throttle	=
Decrease throttle	-
Zero throttle	\
1/3 throttle	[
2/3 throttle	]
Toggle cockpit on/off	

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Product Information Number 187

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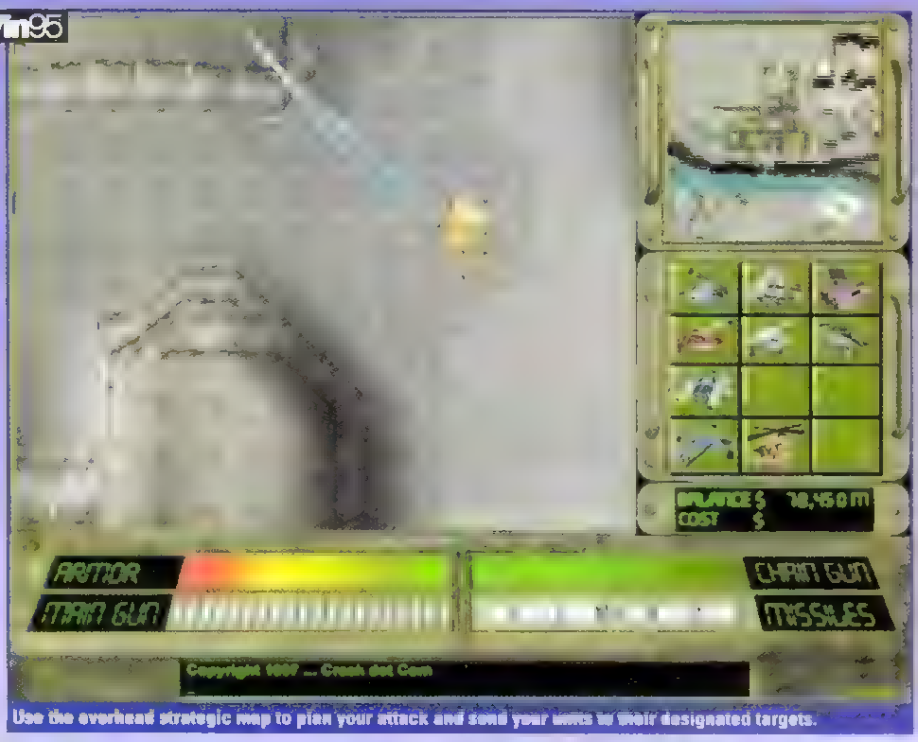
Product Information Number 149

Golgotha

Win95

Company: Crack dot Com
Tech Support: *www.crack.com*
Category: Action/Strategy
Required: Windows 95 w/ 3D acceleration; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 104MB HD space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \GOLGOTHA\GOLGDEMO4.EXE



Use the overhead strategic map to plan your attack and send your units to their designated targets.

Golgotha is the name of a hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. It's also the focus of a mystery that plunges the world into World War Three. The year is 2048, and after a mysterious occurrence involving an archeological dig, tensions between the current superpowers escalate. Doubting the honesty of his leaders, the man in charge of a military strike into Iraq defies his orders. You take his role as he searches for answers to the mystery with all the mortal powers of the world hunting him down and the supernatural powers of the unknown drawing him on.

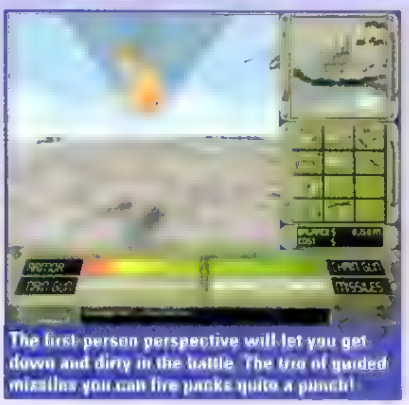
This demo is a very early version of the game engine. You control your troops and the flow of the battle from inside a huge super-tank. Your job is to shoot and destroy the enemy, but it's also to take tactical advantage of any situations that may arise during the battle.

When the demo begins, you'll see an introductory movie. You can jump in at any time and start firing away yourself by pressing Tab. You control your tank with the keyboard, making it move forward and backward with the up and down arrow keys, and turn from side to side with the left and right arrows. Press the spacebar to fire your main gun, and the Enter key to launch a trio of powerful guided missiles.

Clicking on the radar at the top right will put you in the strategic map view. From here, you can build more units to send into battle and control their movements. Simply click on the unit you want to build at the middle right, and they'll appear on the platform at the bottom left of the combat area. To move them, simply click on them and then click a new destination on the map. If they encounter enemy troops on the way, they'll fire at will. You can also control your tank in the same manner — select your tank on the overhead map, and when you click on a new destination, it'll move there automatically. Hit Tab again to go back to the tank view, and you can control the turret with the mouse (hold down the right mouse button) while the tank continues to drives to its destination.

JUST FOR FUN

For this very early demo version of Golgotha, you can play two ways. You can either run around and destroy all the enemy units, or you can command your army to do it. Simply park your tank somewhere, create units, and send them out. Send your units out in groups of two or three to destroy as many enemy units as they can, and see how well they fare. It's a good indication of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the units in the full game.


The first-person perspective will let you get down and dirty in the battle. The trio of guided missiles you can fire packs quite a punch!

Accelerated on a 3Dfx card, the graphics of Golgotha are simply stunning.

In the demo, your tank is indestructible, but your units aren't. You can experiment with sending out units, and capturing a bank. You should check out the README.DOC file located in the \GOLGDEMO\DOCS directory created on your hard drive for more information.

SPECIAL NOTE: This demo *requires* a 3Dfx based 3D accelerator. Also, it requires 103MB of hard-drive space to install — but once you install the demo, you can delete the setup files, freeing about 48MB of space. When you execute the GOLGDEMO.EXE file, it will prompt you with a directory to extract the folders to. You can simply type in a directory of your choosing (we recommend C:\GOLGINST). Once the program is finished extracting the files, you can then go to the directory you extracted them to, and run the SETUP.EXE file to install the demo (it will install to the \GOLG DEMO directory). Once the demo has finished installing, you can then delete all the files in the first directory (i.e. \GOLGINST) to save disc space

Take No Prisoners

Win95

Watch out for the baddies when you are at the entrance to the Alamo — you might get more than you bargained for.

Company: Red Orb Entertainment
Tech Support: (415) 382-4777
Category: Action
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 47MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \TNPDEMO\SETUP.EX

Imagine playing *Doom* from a top-down, third-person view, where you can see the monsters coming at you from all sides. That's the premise of *Take No Prisoners*, and the result is furious fighting from a fresh perspective as you make your way through one of the game's 20 post-apocalyptic territories.

Control is easy — use the arrow keys to move forward, back, and turn, and use the Control key to fire your weapon. Many other commands are listed in the control key box, and for more, press F1 in the game for a help menu full of options. The perspective takes some getting used to, but soon you'll be blasting away creatures will little regard to where they are. You can switch the camera from a fixed position with your character at the bottom, or to a free view with your character in the center of the screen. Switch between the two by pressing the Tab key.

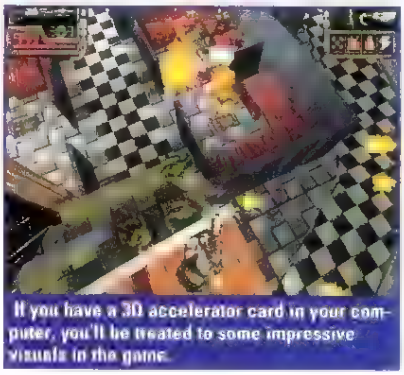
Throughout the level, you'll find different terminals that will give you a variety of information. You can download information on the enemies you'll face or take a look at a local map of the area with key elements pointed out. You can read the downloaded information by pulling down your P.D.D. (Personal Data Device) with the tilde (~) key, and use the Tab key to access the various functions. You'll find a database on your weapons, armor, and items, as well as information about your enemies (when you download info about them) and a map of the general area. Three exits exist in the demo, but you can't use them to leave the demo level. There is also a health station that will power up your med-kit and provide you with full health. To use the terminals, just walk up to them and hit the spacebar.

The main goal of the *Take No Prisoners* demo is to infiltrate the Alamo, a building in the center of the level that's held by a bunch of survivalists. Getting through the front doors isn't easy — be sure to save your game before you try. There's a trick to it, but we'll let you figure that one out for yourself. You can also try a special multiplayer version of Kill at Will, a deathmatch game where your job is kill more players than anyone else in five minutes. You can play with as many as eight of your friends. The full version contains 20 territories to explore, more than 20 weapons to discover, and 22 enemies to kill. All of the levels are as non-linear as this one, and even more fun.

CONTROL KEYS

Move forward	↑
Move back	↓
Turn left	←
Turn right	→
Run mode	Shift
Lock run mode	Caps Lock
Jump	/
Fire weapon	Ctrl
Cycle weapon	A
Use item	Enter
Cycle items	W
Use med-kit	Backspace
Activate P.D.D.	~
Switch functions	Tab
Use world object	Spacebar

The ravaged city streets in *Take No Prisoners* contain all sorts of bizarre creatures that will dig in plenty of unique and fun ways.



If you have a 3D accelerator card in your computer, you'll be treated to some impressive visuals in the game.

Product Information Number 341

TAKE THE GALAXY BY FORCE.

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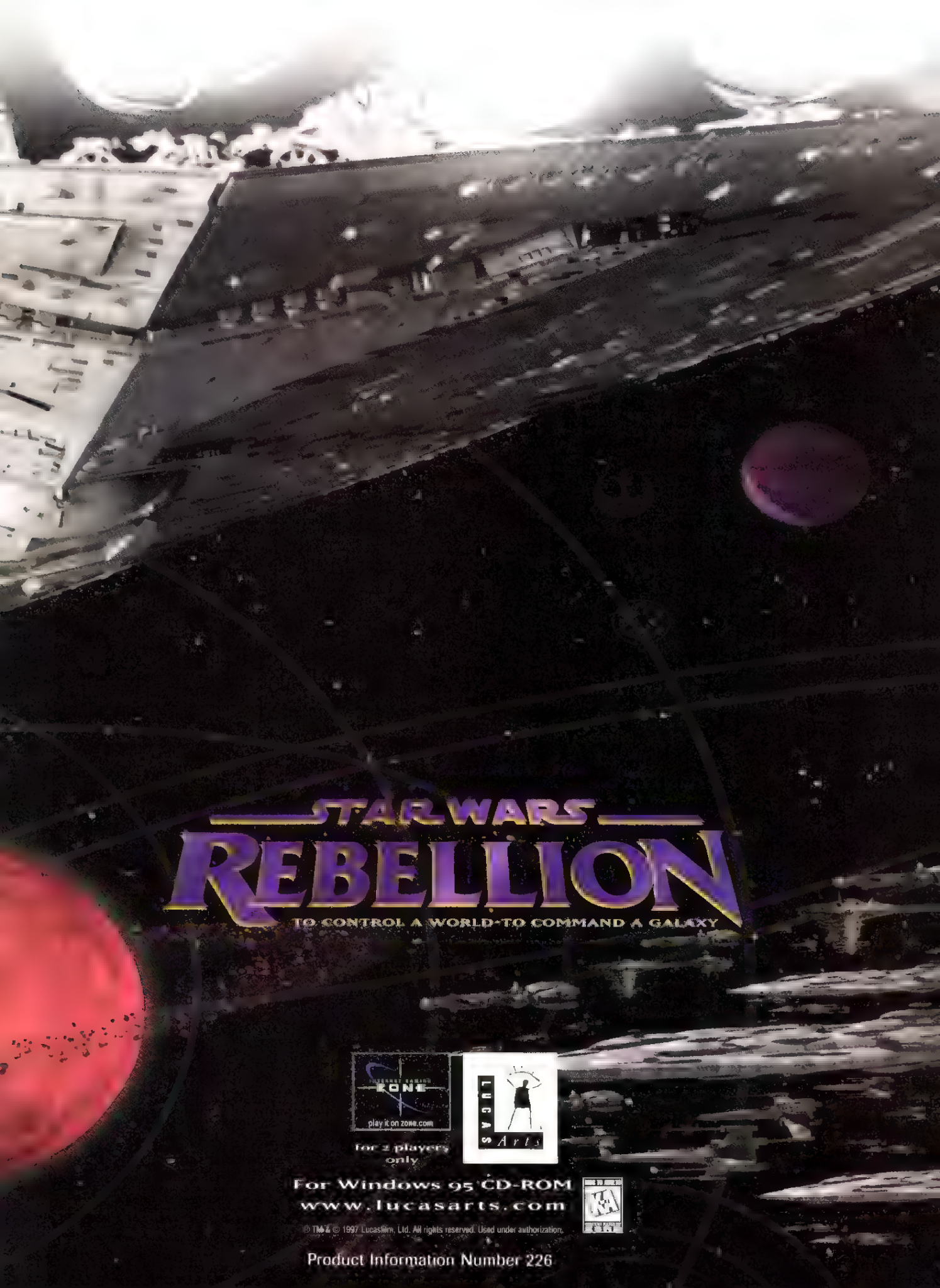
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Product Information Number 226

SODA: Off-Road Racing

Win95

You have to watch yourself while going around the sharper corners, or your view of the world will become a bit skewed when you're launched in to the air.

Company: Sierra
Tech Support: (206) 644-4343
Category: Arcade
Required: Windows [illegible]; 34MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \SODA\SETUP.EXE

There are several different views to choose from — just hit the spacebar until you find the one you want to use.

Watch dirt fly and vehicles skid through some of the toughest tracks you've ever seen when the Short-course Off-road Drivers Association gets together with Papyrus for a new arcade racer. The game itself is pretty self-explanatory — you get behind the wheel of an off-road vehicle, and you try to beat the other guys to the finish line. Of course, if racing was that easy, everyone would be Mario Andretti.

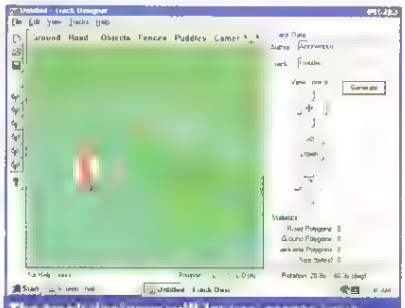
The demo contains one track you can race and one kind of car. However, you can tweak and play with the car to your heart's content, changing the engine power, traction, suspension, and even the gearing. The demo puts you in a small, light, fast 2x4 buggy. The other two vehicles — the 800-horsepower 2x4 and 4x4 — aren't available in the demo, but if you watch the introductory flick roll, you'll see some of those cars in action.

Because of the rather high system requirements, you might have to shut off a few graphics options to get an optimal frame rate. Click on the Options menu from the main menu to adjust detail. Most of the options are set on automatic, which will cut out textures as needed to maintain a fast, smooth frame rate.

The track in the demo, "Tropic Treat," isn't the vacation it might sound like. The cars slip around a lot, so you'll need to practice quite a bit if you want to keep your car from spinning out of control. The trick is to go easy on the gas. Be careful with those brakes, too — braking at the wrong moment could mean an uncontrolled spin. To adjust the controls to something that fits your style, go into the Options menu.

The demo also contains a sample of the powerful and versatile track designer that comes with the game. Creating a track is as simple as clicking the mouse a few times, as you can tell from the demo. The demo won't let you save your tracks, but you can build as much as you like.

You can tweak your car as much as you want — just click on the little monkey wrench.

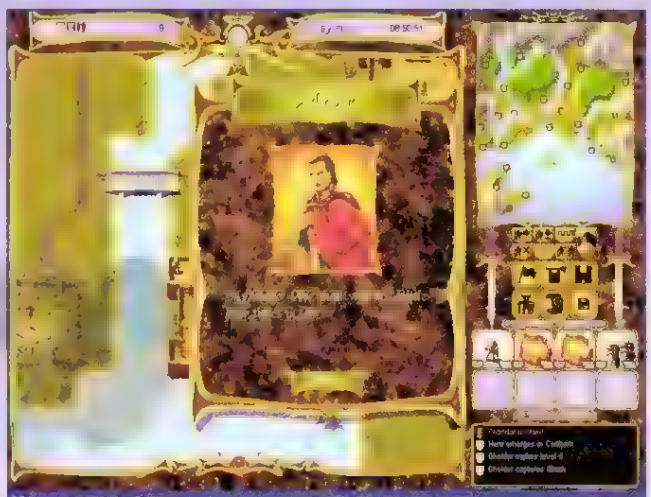


The track designer will let you create your own dream course for racing in the full version of *SODA: Off-Road Racing*.

Warlords III: Reign of Heroes

Win95

Company: Red Orb Entertainment
Tech Support: (415) 382-4700
Category: Strategy
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 35MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: WARLORDS\SETUP.EXE



Your combat adviser in *Warlords III* will tell you the odds against any chosen battle.

In a land of magic and monsters, good battles evil in a never-ending struggle for supremacy. You are in command of an army in this fantastical battlefield, and your job is to crush any and all opposition. To accomplish this, you can hire heroes to lead your individual armies into war. Your main goal is to capture all available cities. Once you complete that task, wiping up the remains of the enemy will be little to no problem.

We strongly recommend that players new to the Warlords series play through the tutorial scenario to get an idea of how the game works. It's a turn-based strategy game where you must build armies, capture cities, and outthink your enemy. Use heroes to boost the stats of the army they're attached to. You get your first hero for free, but you have to pay lots of money for subsequent heroes. Build armies in the cities to take over other cities — if you don't have a fighting force, you don't pose much of a threat.

You control your individual armies in stacks, represented by an icon of the most important unit in the stack (usually the hero). Select the entire stack by double-clicking it, or click on it once and press the spacebar. To move your armies, simply move the cursor to where you want them to go, and you should see a boot icon. Click, and your army will walk there. Heroes can explore ruined towers and search for lost treasure — just walk to the ruined tower, and when the mouse cursor becomes a question mark over the hero, click to look for any goodies left behind.

Combat is where the real fun lies in *Warlords III*, though. To take on a neutral or enemy city, simply walk right up to the edge of the walls, and when the cursor becomes a pair of crossed swords, click to start the battle. If you hold down the shift key, a question mark will appear over the swords, and when you click you'll access the Combat Adviser, who will tell you your chances of winning the battle.

Once you take a city, you can occupy it, pillage it, sack it, or raze it. If you occupy it, you'll take it over without really hurting it. If you pillage, you'll take it over and earn some money, but the city will suffer. Sacking a city damages it severely and keeps it from producing armies, but you'll earn a lot of money. Razing it levels the entire city, leaving an empty, useless ruin behind.

Once you have a new city, you can start producing more armies. You can also "vector" the newly built armies from one city to another, so you can automatically gather new forces at the front lines. Determine where the armies should travel by clicking the Set Vectoring button when you assign what kind of armies the city should produce.

The best battles are those in which your forces completely outnumber the enemy.

As you battle your way through the game, your heroes will gain experience and levels. When they gain a level, they earn a certain number of Ability points. With these points, you can buy more skills for the hero, like strength or faster movement. The heroes can go as high as level ten, at which point they're pretty well decked out.

The demo contains the tutorial and one additional scenario, called Elven Guardians. The full scenario is much tougher than the tutorial, but with a bit of skill and thought, you'll lead your armies to victory.

The tutorial might lead you to believe the game is easy, but by playing the Elven Guardians scenario you see how tough the opposition can be.

YOU'VE LOOKED

Even your high school yearbook picture was more becoming than this. But as an alien, glamour is not high on your agenda. So, bust out of the traditional strategy game mold, morph into a human and make enemies with your friends. Conquest Earth is a world you'll want to step into very carefully.

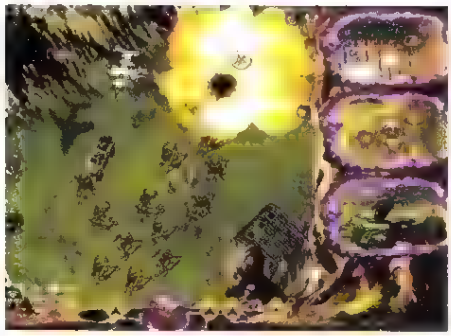
"THE VISUAL EFFECTS ARE SPECTACULAR"
COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

"STUNNING VISUALS AND INTENSE GAMEPLAY"
PC GAMER

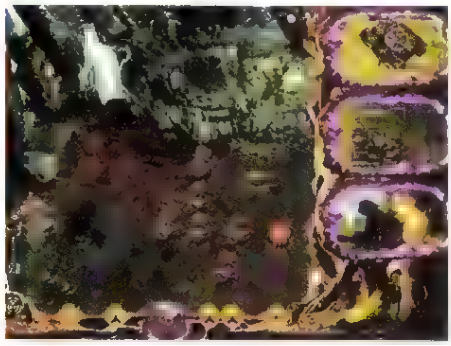
CONQUESTEARTH

WHERE STRATEGY TAKES ON A NEW FORM

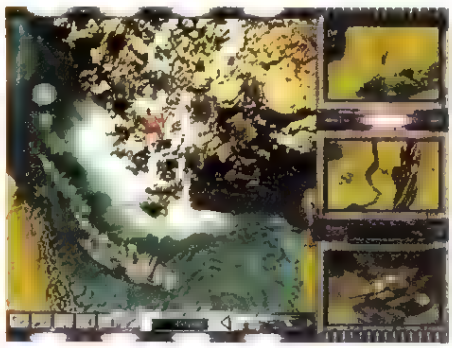
BETTER.



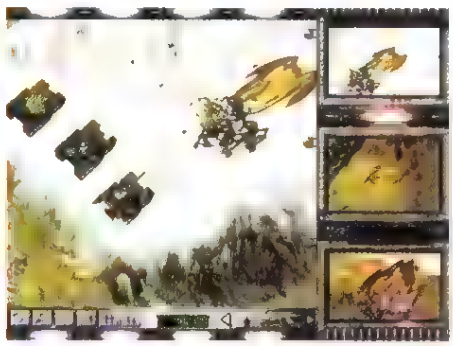
You can play either side in this intergalactic strategy game. Instantly morph into a weapon or battle tank—even a human being.



When playing the alien side, you'll experience a unique interface with different rules and capabilities. You'll employ never-before-seen tactics and strategies to foil your human counterparts.



Vary your strategy to keep your opponents guessing. Keep track by monitoring them through your interface portals. With over 65,000 colors, the action will come to life like never before.



Playing the human side, you'll need to manage your resources wisely. Thwart the aliens' attempt to mine oxygen from the atmosphere. Only one race will remain standing after this war. Make sure it's yours.

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Product Information Number 135

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Product Information Number 170

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PGA Tour Pro

Win95

Company: EA Sports
Tech Support: (415) 572-2787
Category: Sports
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 16MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \PGADEMO\PGADEMOINSTALL.EXE

Getting this close to the cup and still missing is painful, especially on a difficult green like this one.

Sometimes there's nothing more relaxing than spending the day out on some beautiful green grass, listening to the birds in the trees, striking a small white ball, and chasing it for hundreds of yards just to hit it again.

EA Sports makes the game of golf come alive in the latest PGA Tour game. You can try your hand at a single hole in the demo, a par-four straightaway that contains a deviously difficult green. Playing the game couldn't be simpler; just use the mouse to set up your shot — click and hold the left mouse button on the course, and move the mouse around until the arrow shows the arc you want the ball to take and the area where you want it to land. To change the type of shot you're taking, click on "Shot" on the bottom menu. To hit the ball, place the mouse cursor inside the circle near the bottom of the screen. Click once to start the meter moving. When it reaches the point right before the meter turns red at the top (the power mark), click again. The meter will start to move in the opposite direction. Click it a third time to stop it as close to the bottom of the circle as possible (the accuracy mark). If you want to hit the ball softer than normal, make that second click before the meter gets very high; if you want to slice or hook your shot, make the third click just before or after the meter reaches the line at the bottom.

By using the arrow to set up your shot, you're also determining what kind of club to use. Usually when you set up a shot this way, the shot meter adjusts automatically, so you can try to get the moving line directly vertical at the top and bottom. However, there are many cases in which you need to set up the shot specifically, like for a chip or punch shot.

Hitting your way out of a sand trap isn't fun, but if you line up the swing meter just right, you have a chance of making the most of it.

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Product Information Number 276

Extreme Assault

Company: Blue Byte Software
Tech Support: (847) 595-5981
Category: Action
Required: Pentium; 16MB RAM; 25MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \XDEMO\INSTALL.BAT

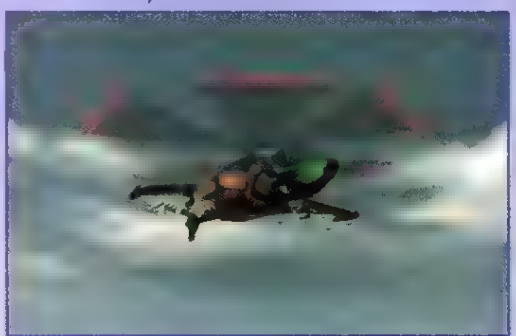
Your vehicles are the Sioux AH-23 attack helicopter and the T1-battle tank, and both of them pack enough punch to take out an army. And that's exactly what you have to do — take out an army.

The demo contains a gauntlet you must complete in 15 minutes. If you make it, you'll be a hero. If you don't, you'll be a pile of smoking rubble. The demo also contains limited multiplayer functions — you can blast as many as three friends out of the sky over a local-area network or Internet connection.

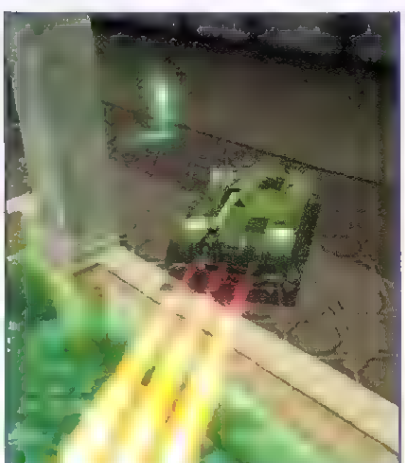
After you load up the demo, you'll get a brief overview of your goals. Basically, you want to destroy everything you can. There are some important commands you can use to make your job easier — take a look at the control keys listed here to find out what they are. Since your job is going to consist of getting through the level in 15 minutes, you don't have a lot of time to spare. After giving it a few tries, you'll quickly learn exactly what you need to destroy to complete the level. It's not easy, but if there are people who can get through the entire game of *Quake* in less than 20 minutes without cheating, you can surely get through one level of *Extreme Assault* in less than 15.

Keep an eye out for power-ups. Missiles or shield repair power-ups will often appear after you destroy an enemy. The extra few seconds it takes to pick up these power-ups are well worth it, especially when you start running into legions of enemies.

If you have a 3Dfx-based 3D accelerator card, you're in for a visual treat. For 3Dfx owners, start the game using the 3DFX.BAT file located in the \BLUEBYTE\EXTREME directory created on your hard drive. Also, the demo contains force-feedback support for joysticks like CH's ForceFX and Microsoft's new force feedback Sidewinder. For more information on how to use these devices, check out the README.TXT file located in the \BLUEBYTE\EXTREME directory created on your hard drive.



The Sioux AH-23 attack helicopter not only looks good, but it packs a punch the enemy won't soon forget.



The T1 battle tank will blow opponents out of the water — literally!

CONTROL KEYS

Climb	A
Dive	Z
Turn left	←
Turn right	→
Forward	↑
Back	↓
Drift left	Alt + ←
Drift right	Alt + →
Fire weapon	Ctrl
Change weapons	A
Fire rocket	Enter
Smart bomb	Spacebar
Thunderbolt	T
Select target	Tab
Zoom radar	Q
HUD on/off	R
Virtual cockpit on/off	9

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Product Information Number 88

Formula 1

Win95

Company: Psygnosis
Tech Support: (415) 655-5683
Category: Arcade
Required: Windows 95 with 3Dfx accelerator card; Pentium; 16MB RAM; Mouse
Install: F1DEMO\F1WIN.EXE

Designed specifically for 3D accelerators, you'd be hard pressed to find a prettier racing game than Psygnosis' *Formula 1*. This demo is designed specifically for the 3Dfx, and it brings out all the best of its power. Containing two tracks, the demo will let you feel and experience the power and force of F1 racers. The game contains stats of 35 real professional drivers and 13 teams, all with the official F1 seal of approval.

Use the arrow keys to steer your car and the A key to accelerate. Put on the brakes with the Z key, and press the S key to shift up your gears. If you get stuck somewhere, press the Spacebar to go into reverse. With the Page Up and Page Down keys, you can change your racing perspective — there are several to choose from, and you're certain to find something you like. If you want to take a look at the race through the eyes of the other drivers, press the Insert and Delete keys to cycle through them.

You can choose to race in Arcade mode or Grand Prix mode. Arcade is much more forgiving when it comes to steering, and it'll brake and shift automatically when you go into a turn, to keep you from losing control. Grand Prix mode is much more challenging, requiring you to do your own braking and shifting. It's easy to lose control in Grand Prix mode, so if you don't get the hang of it at first, don't give up. Practice a bit, and you'll soon be zipping around corners with no problem. You can also set the controls for a digital or analog joystick, or you can use the keyboard. Oddly, we've found that the digital setting provides better control than analog when it comes to playing with a joystick or steering wheel — but experiment with both modes to find the one that suits you best.

Different camera angles give you as wide a view of the action as you like. The full version also contains a replay feature.

The detail of the cars will blow you away.

The full version of the game contains all 17 tracks and has special weather effects like fog and rain to really challenge your driving. Different computer-controlled drivers use different styles, based on the real-life drivers they represent, and the variable levels of difficulty provide a wide range of challenges.

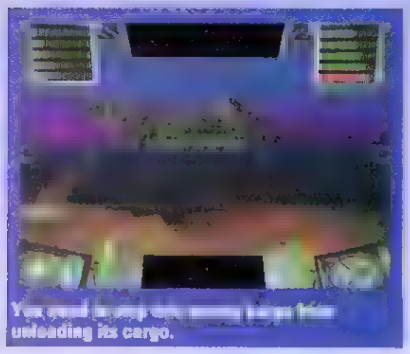
The lowest in-car view will put you right at the ground for a tremendous feeling of speed.

Product Information Number 332

SandWarriors

Company: Interplay
Tech Support: (714) [illegible]
Category: Action
Required: Pentium; [illegible] hard drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \SWDEMO\INSTALL.EXE

The House Set and the House Osiris are at war. After so many years of conflict, their planet, Tawy, is dying. Now both houses race to colonize a small, habitable planet. That planet is known as Earth, and the time is 6225 BC. Fighting over the Egyptian desert, it's a conflict that will shape the future of the planet.



You need to stop this enemy barge from unloading its cargo.

The demo of *SandWarriors* lets you try your hand at a single mission as a pilot for the House Osiris. It will take some tricky maneuvering to accomplish your mission. In order to fly the ship with the default keyboard setup, look at the control keys listed here. You can also configure the controls to suit your preferences from the Options menu. We recommend a joystick, but it's not required.

The demo will send you off to an enemy incursion, where you'll have to stop House Set's barges from unloading supplies and deal with the enemy's air support. That's not an easy task, but if you keep your wits about you, it can be done. Be sure to switch through your weapons to get an idea of the firepower available, and don't waste your rockets on weak targets — you'll need them later.

The full version of *SandWarriors* includes 24 missions, a total of ten weapons, and even more gorgeous rendered graphics. You can also perform airborne maneuvers that will trick your opponents and help you demolish the ranks of House Set.

CONTROL KEYS

Increase speed at high rate	A
Decrease speed at high rate	Z
Afterburner	tab
Target Craft	T
Toggle cockpit	C
Engage auxiliary thrusters	arrows
Fire	Ctrl
'Orion Corona' maneuver	F12
'Sun Drop' flare	~
'Osirus Vizier' chain gun	1
'Porphyr' canister cannon	2
'Palermo Invader' dumb missile	5
Next weapon available	Spacebar
In-flight map facility	M
Repeat mission objectives	0
Access in game menu screen	esc

XCar: Experimental Racing

Company: Bethesda Softworks
Tech Support: (301) [illegible]
Category: Arcade
Required: Pentium [illegible] hard drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: See Below

Playing with the sweet fun you'd expect racing games, and this one is no exception.

If you thought Bethesda's XnGine technology was only good for first-person shooters and RPGs like the Terminator games and *Daggerfall*, Bethesda has a surprise for you — it's a detailed, fast-paced auto racing game.

You can do it all in *XCar*, from building custom wheels for your car to modifying engine performance. In the demo, you can try out one car on two different tracks. The game includes different weather conditions, so don't be surprised if you're racing in the rain. Of course, you'll have to watch for those weather effects that affect your grip on the track.

CONTROL KEYS

Steer	← →
Accelerate	↑
Brake	↓
Shift up	A
Shift down	Z
HUD toggle	Spacebar
Reverse	R
Map	Tab
Steering	F8
Auto braking	F9

If you need breathtaking graphics and blistering performance, you'll be in heaven with *XCar*.

You can configure the realism of the game to suit your desires — the default mode handles all the shifting and braking for you, so all you have to do is accelerate and keep the car on the road while the computer handles the corners. Take a look at the control keys here to get the information to do just that. If you crank the realism setting higher, you can handle the shifting and braking yourself — but like any true racing simulation, it's not an easy task, so work yourself up to it gradually.

SPECIAL NOTE: There are two versions of *XCar* on *The CD*. If you have a 3Dfx-based 3D accelerator, run the INSTALL.BAT file in the \XCARDEMO\FXDEMO directory on *The CD*. Otherwise, run the INSTALL.BAT file for the software-only version in the \XCARDEMO\SOFTDEMO directory on *The CD*.

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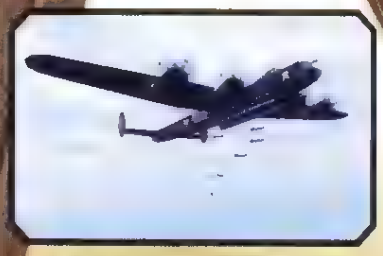
[illegible] REALISTIC [illegible]

[illegible] head rotation and fully functioning instrument panels. Plus, native 3-D card support and software emulation of 3-D hardware features enhance breathtaking hand-built, texture-mapped terrain.



[illegible]

[illegible]

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Lords of the Realm II

Win95

The skirmish mode will let you hop right into some real-time combat.

Company: Sierra
Tech Support: (206) [illegible]
Category: Strategy
Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 8MB RAM; 32MB hard-drive space; SVGA; Mouse
Install: \REALM\SETUP.EXE

Lords of the Realm II takes place in medieval times, when lives were ruled by nobility and serfs slaved for the blue-bloods. In this game, you get to play one of the nobles, thank goodness — but your job isn't just to oversee your serfs; you'll also battle other nobles and make sure they don't take your land.

You have to organize your kingdom, sending your peasants into the fields, mines, or forests to provide resources, as well as putting them to work back in town to produce all the goods that come from those resources.

The real fun comes in the skirmish mode, though. New with the *Siege Pack* for *Lords of the Realm II*, skirmish mode lets you jump quickly and easily into a real-time battle between your forces and the enemy's. It also gives you a whole new campaign to play in the full strategic mode, as well as a map editor for creating your own skirmishes. The demo contains three skirmish scenarios — one for playing a siege, one for an equal battle, and one for an uneven battle.

The turn-based, strategic portion of *Lords II* is pretty complex. The demo points out some valuable information when you begin the scenario, so pay close attention. Thereafter, right-clicking on a button will display a short description of its function. Experiment a little, and you'll get the hang of it.

From this screen, you can drag your peasants to various tasks in your town.

The main idea is to drag your peasants to various tasks. Select them by dragging the selection box around them, then click and drag them to the new industry. You can raise an army by dragging them to the castle, and farm by dragging them to the fields.

Once you build an army, you can charge off and fight the enemy in real-time, as you do in skirmish mode. In either case, the game works like most real-time strategy games; select the units you want to move, and click where you want them to move or attack. It's as simple as that.

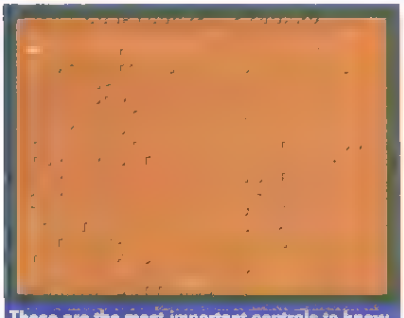
Skrap

Win95

Company: Neuroware Entertainment
Tech Support: [illegible]
Category: Action
Required: Required: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 21MB hard drive space
Install: \SKRAP\SKRAPSW.EXE

You've seen hundreds of stories in which machines take over the world, but the world of *Skrap* has a unique twist: humanity's downfall came at the hands of megacorporations that grew so huge they became sentient.

Skrap is a state-of-the-art action game with the intensity of an arcade classic. You pilot a futuristic helicopter, and your goal is to support ground troops through various missions to overthrow the evil corporations. The demo lets you play one mission. You must deploy and protect an explosive truck until it reaches its target, a corporate base. Of course, the enemy will be defending its installation, so get ready for a battle!



These are the most important controls to know when you start flying your mission.

If your chopper is destroyed, you reappear in a new one. You've got an unlimited number of helicopters, but you'll have to keep an eye on the resource meter in the lower right corner of the screen. Every vehicle and heli copter you deploy will reduce the amount of resources, which only replenishes itself slowly. If you don't have enough resources to create a new helicopter when your old one is destroyed, that's the end of the game.

Keep the road clear of enemy tanks so your vehicles can reach the bad guys' base.

Your starting point is on a road in a desolate landscape; the enemy base is a little way down the road. The bad guys will keep sending tanks toward your base — keep the road clear so your forces can reach the enemy.

You may use the keys shown here to control the helicopter with your keyboard, but it's much easier to use a joystick. Deploy ground units with the number keys: 0 will send out an explosive truck, and 1 will release a support tank. Use caution, though; these units eat up a lot of resources.

Skrap supports 3D acceleration, which you can configure through the options menu. It will default to no acceleration, so if you have a 3D card, be sure to set it up. For more information, check out the INSTRUCT.TXT file copied to your hard drive in the \SKRAPSW directory

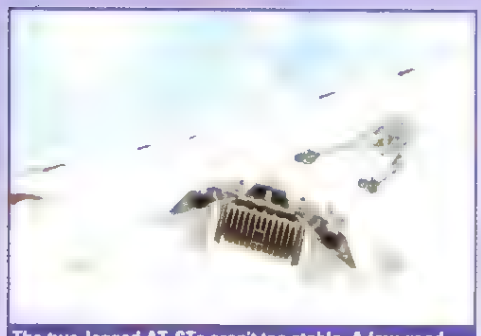
Shadows of the Empire

Win95

Company: LucasArts
Tech Support: (415) [illegible]
Category: Action
Required: Windows 95, supported 3D accelerator card (see below); Pentium; 16MB RAM; 12MB hard-drive space; Mouse
Install: \SHADOWS\SHADOWS.EXE

Shadows of the Empire is a beautiful arcade-style game set in (surprise!) the Star Wars universe. The full version will take you through ten missions against the Empire; the demo lets you play through the first mission, the Battle of Hoth.

You fly a snow-speeder through four stages of the mission. Be careful, because you have only four lives to last you all the way through. The first stage pits you against some pesky probe droids, which you should be able to chew through easily. Stage two introduces the two-legged AT-ST walkers, best known for stepping on Ewoks in *Return of the Jedi*. These guys are a little tougher and can take quite a bit of abuse before they fall.



The two-legged AT-STs aren't too stable. A few good hits, and they'll go down like a drunk monkey.

The third stage throws a full AT-AT walker into the fray. Its shields are so strong that it could take all day to blast through 'em, so you take these big boys down with — you guessed it — harpoons and tow cables! Nail the legs with a harpoon, wrap the cable around three times, and watch them fall. It's easier said than done. The final stage combines each of those enemies for a major blast-fest.

A joystick is highly recommended, but you can control your speeder with the keyboard and the mouse if you like. Check out the default control keys here, or configure them yourself from the main menu. Just hit Escape when you start the game and choose Controls to change them around.

When you start the game, you'll have to create a pilot. This is where you choose your difficulty level. As the levels increase, the game gets harder in two ways: your speeder's shields are less effective, and enemies take more hits before they go down. The Jedi level is recommended for experienced Rebel pilots only!

SPECIAL NOTE: *Shadows of the Empire* requires a 3D graphics accelerator to run, but you'll probably agree that it's worth it when you see the enormous level of detail in each of the vehicles. The demo works with 3Dfx, Rendition, and Permedia II cards, but other chipsets are not supported. Unsupported chipsets include 3D Rage and Rage II, Cirrus Laguna, Matrox, PowerVR, and S3 ViRGE.

CONTROL KEYS

Pause	esc
Nose down	↑
Turn left	←
Turn right	→
Nose up	↓
Brakes	A
Thrust	Z
Fire harpoon	Spacebar
Camera position	Tab
Fire lasers	X
Quit game	Alt + Q

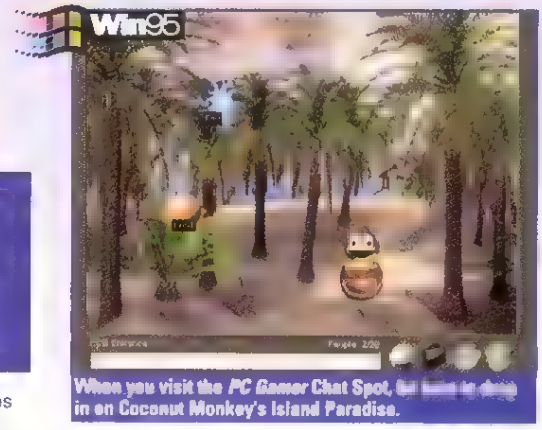
JUST FOR FUN

After you complete the demo, a screen will pop up telling you how long you took. Some of us at *PC Gamer* were able to play through the entire demo in under six minutes — on the "hard" level. It's not easy to do; in fact, Joe! lost a whole day's productivity just trying! See if you can do it.

The Palace

Win95

Company: The Palace, Inc.
Tech Support: (800) 708-8[illegible]
Release Date: Available [illegible]
Category: Online Chat
Required: Windows 95; 3[illegible]; [illegible]; hard-drive space; SVGA; [illegible]; 14.4 Internet connect
Install: \PALACE\16PAL_21.EXE (Win3.1)
\PALACE\32SER_30.EXE (Win95)



When you visit the *PC Gamer* Chat Spot, [illegible] in on Coconut Monkey's Island Paradise.

Enter a world where everyone shares the same love you do — computer games. *The Palace* is an online chat program that lets you meet with other gamers via the Internet.

To get started, simply run the setup file appropriate for your operating system (16PAL_21.EXE for Windows 3.1, or 32SER_30.EXE for Windows 95) located in the \PALACE directory on *The CD*. Once installed, run *The Palace* by clicking the appropriate icon in your Start Menu. To connect to a Palace site, such as *PC Gamer*'s own Island Paradise, you'll fire up your SLIP or PPP connection to the Internet, then launch *The Palace* and choose "Connect to a Palace" from the File menu. Where it says "Palace Site:" enter *palace.pcgamer. com*. The number next to it should be *9998*. Now click Okay, and you'll connect to the Imagine Games Network (it may take a moment for the background art to load as you enter each area). To chat, type your message on the line at the bottom of the screen and smack the Enter key; you'll see your words appear next to your smiling face where everyone can read and reply to them in real-time. To head to the *PC Gamer* area, click the appropriate TV screen.

Until you register the software for $25 by calling The Palace, Inc. at the phone number listed above, you won't be able to change your name, and you'll have limited options for customizing your smiley-face with props. If you're running the Windows 95 version, 3.0, you'll also have the Auditorium plug-in, which lets registered users participate in conferences with game developers, *PC Gamer* staffers, and other giants of the computer game community. For information on what conferences we're having and when we'll have them, check out our web site at *www.pcgamer.com*.

The *PC Gamer* Palace site is a part of the entire Imagine Games Network palace. That means you can interact with readers and editors of other magazines that are a part of Imagine Publishing, like *Next Generation*, *Ultra Game Players*, and our web 'zines, *N64.com*, *PSX Power*, and *Saturn World*. They'll also have special events on the site, so make sure you check out their web pages for details.

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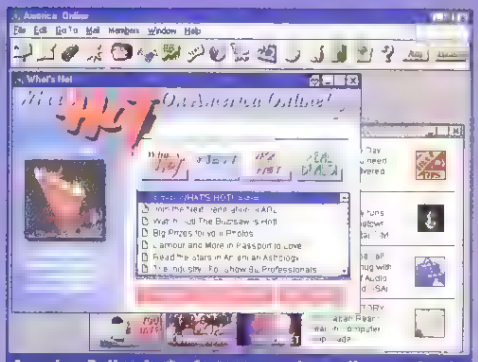

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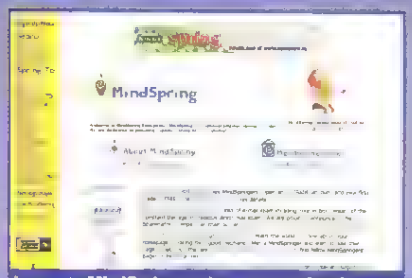

Log on to MindSpring, and you can cruise the Internet in many different ways.

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If you use Microsoft's Dial-Up Networking rather than the default Pipeline software, you can also have a TCP/IP connection to the Internet, a necessary component for all those multi-player games that use TCP/IP connections, like *Quake*, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, and *Interstate '76*. You can also opt to use any utilities that use TCP/IP connections, like *The Palace* online chat.

With its realistic pricing and a whole slew of services available, MindSpring is a good jumping-off point for anyone wanting to get onto the Internet. Best of all, if you install the software from *The CD*, the $25 launching fee will be waived.

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EarthLink

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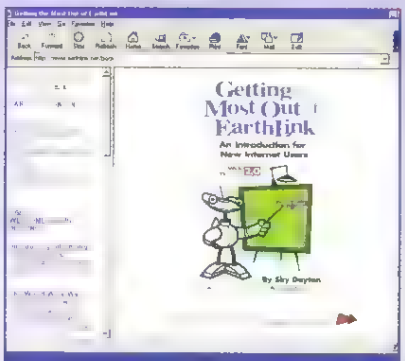

EarthLink puts you on the Internet quickly and easily, opening huge doors of information and entertainment.

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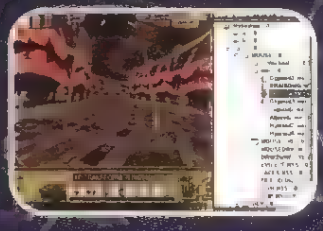

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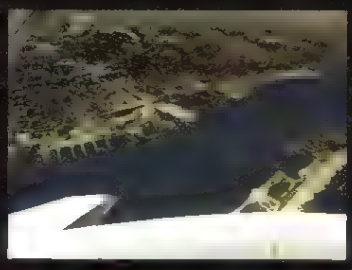

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Dynamix

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Product Information Number 305

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– Computer Gaming World

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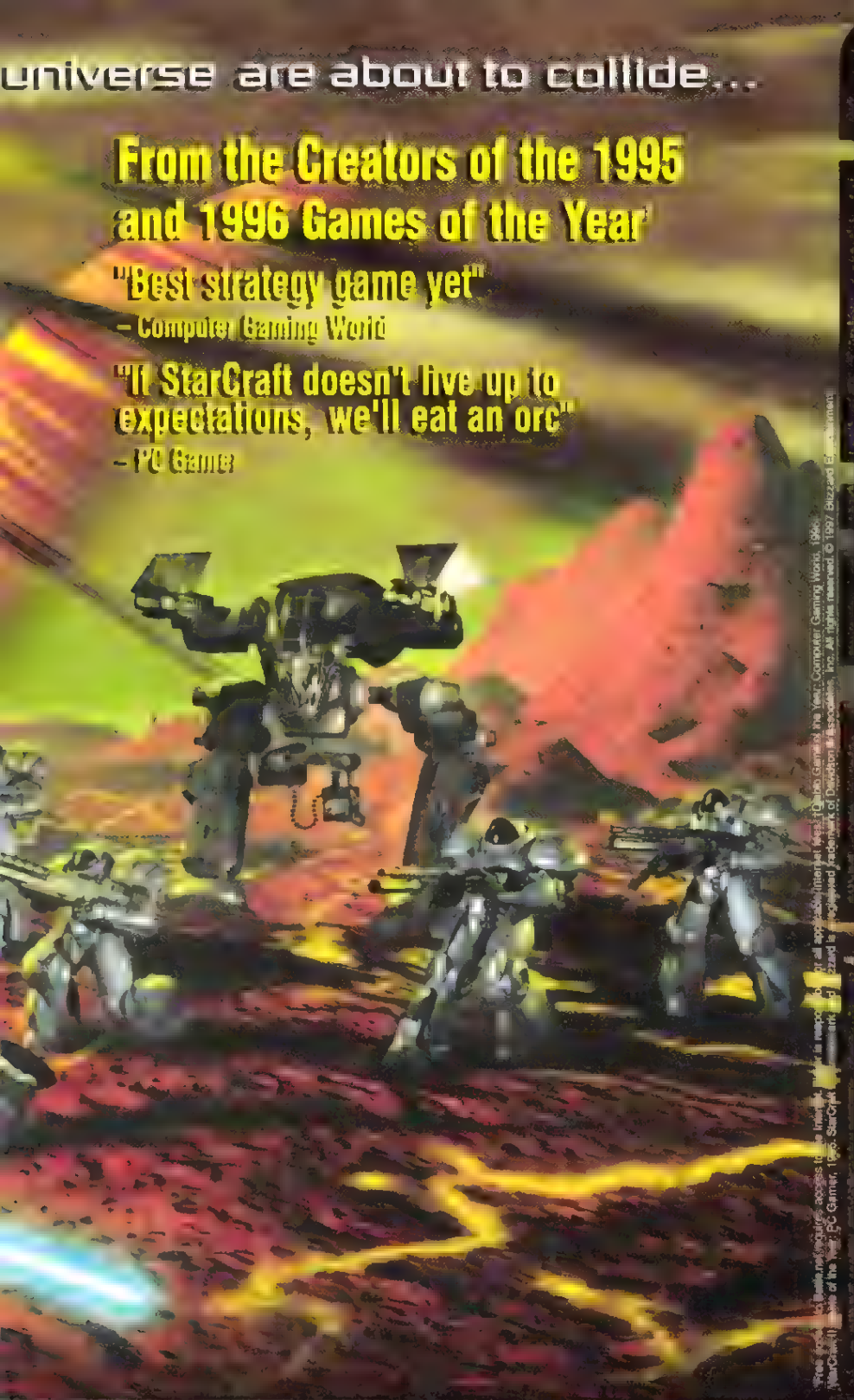

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Product Information Number 105

SCOOP!

EXCLUSIVE! BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF THE HOTTEST GAMES

Half-Life

Valve raises the bar for first-person shooters

With *Quake*-engine games cropping up everywhere, *Half-Life*'s "Microsofties" developers plan on bringing some fresh ideas to a crowded genre.

— Jason Bates

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Half-Life
Developer: Valve Software
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, 3380 146th Place S.E. Suite 300, Bellevue, WA 98007 (800) 757-7707
Projected Price: N/A
Percentage Complete: 75%

In a nutshell:
It's a *Quake* engine, first-person shooter focused on single-player gameplay, but without neglecting the multi-player aspect.

What's so special?
There's about half a dozen "Sons of *Quake*" in the works; of them, perhaps only *Half-Life* looks like a completely different game. There is more innovation here in terms of technology, design, and looks than in most of the other *Quake*-engine products.

Why should I care?
This is Valve's first project, and judging from what we've seen so far, they have the potential to vault into the top rank of PC game developers — serious competition for *Quake II*, perhaps?

And when's it coming out?
December '97

We're all gamers here." It's an oft-heard homily from the game industry's hype machine. What they say may be true, at least in some cases — but when it comes to the developers at Valve, the creators of *Half-Life*, it's an unstated, unremarked-upon fact.

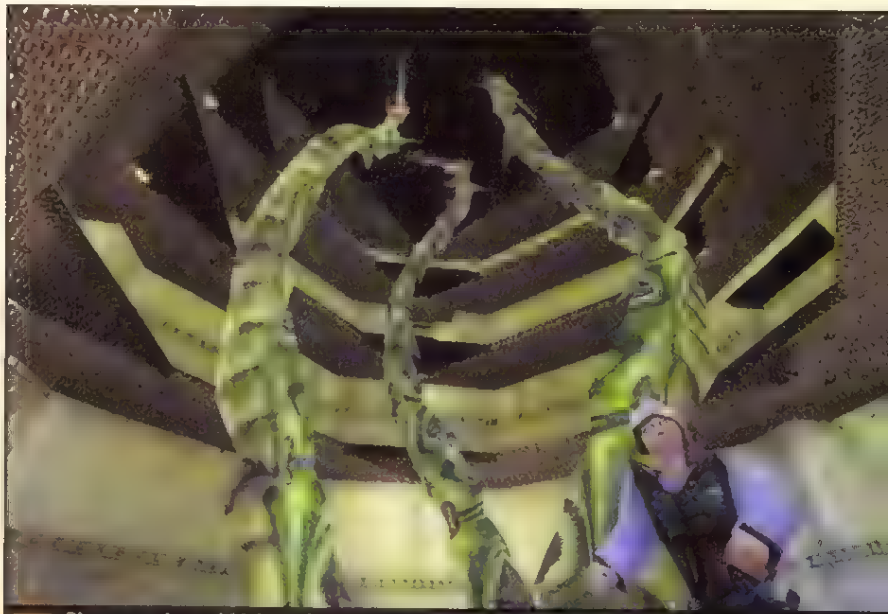
Half a dozen key people — designers and programmers like Ben Morris, Dave Riller, Steve Bond, John Guthrie, Dario Casali - were culled from the wild, booming talent pool that is the Internet *Quake* community. Others come from more traditional industry backgrounds: Harry Teasley earned his spurs at Shiny Entertainment; artist Chuck Jones comes from 3D Realms straight from *Duke Nukem 3D*.

Collectively, the team at Valve has contributed to nearly 50 different computer games, shareware programs, business applications, operating systems, and online services. It's an immense breadth of experience, ranging from *Windows*, *Windows NT*, and *Microsoft Word* to *WorldCraft*, PlayStation *Doom*, and *Civilization*.

But it's the Microsoft connection that's most pertinent — co-founders Mike Harrington and Gabe Newell were long-time employees at the world's largest and most successful software company. Now Newell and Harrington are applying what they learned in Redmond to the games industry

Valve's battle plan resembles Microsoft in microcosm. Microsoft's success has always come from identifying key technologies, then replicating them through a combination of business savvy, a maniacal work ethic, and hiring smart On a smaller scale, Valve has licensed the game industry's best technology, has partnered with retail distribution giant Sierra, and recruited some of the best available talent. All this is being brought to bear in *Half-Life*.

Strong credentials are one thing, but what about the game? We all know there's a whole slew of *Quake*-engine games in the works — *Quake II*, *SiN*, *Daikatana*, *Hexen II*, *Duke Nukem Forever*, maybe even a Rogue project — so standing out from the crowd has to mean



Giant tentacles and frightened security guards — the creatures in *Half-Life* are a diverse lot. This particular tentacled horror lives in a missile pit, and you'll have to make your way around it carefully

Microsofties

Mike Harrington and Gabe Newell, co-founders of Valve, spent nine and 13 years at Microsoft in Redmond, WA, respectively. Harrington was a developer or lead developer on OS/2 and Windows NT, while Newell ran the Windows 1.0 and 2.0 programs, started Microsoft's multimedia division and led Internet development.

Having been involved in so many Microsoft projects, the two have some unique insight into the argument that's been raging about Direct3D and OpenGL. Newell comments on the debate:

"I have sort of a strange perspective, being ex-Microsoft, and having participated in some of the discussions around DirectX and the decision to do Direct3D instead of OpenGL, and also knowing the position of people in the gaming industry," says Newell. "I hope that Microsoft takes the suggestions of the gaming community to heart. I think everybody would be better served by coming up with a good, consensus solution. We're going to try to stay out of it, we have enough to do building a game. We don't want to get into arguments or flame wars with anybody; our focus is on serving our customers.

"I think John [Carmack] makes fantastic points about the usability of Direct3D; and I understand intimately the decision-making process at Microsoft, and why they're struggling to accommodate that kind of input from the industry," he says. "I think DirectGL would be a great solution. It would give Microsoft what they need, given their marketing and business priorities, but also gives the developers what they would want in terms of the tool sets. Hopefully some sort of consensus like that will emerge."

This shambling alien from the underground installation is one mean cookie.

doing more than just another run-and-gun dungeon in a John Carmack engine.

And *Half-Life* definitely stands out from the crowd.

Specifics

Let's start with the monsters, one of the most immediately noticeable differences. Unlike virtually every other game, the creatures in *Half Life* use something called skeletal animation. "Rather than having a sort of snapshotted animation, we actually deform the mesh in real-time," explains Gabe Newell. "The skeletal animation allows for more complex characters and scripted animation."

With this system, the different characters are given a whole slew of animations apiece, including "idle" animations, where they twiddle their thumbs while waiting for a character to appear. Also possible are compound animations, where, as in one example, the tongue is a separate animation from the rest of the monster.

Not only does the skeleton animation make the monsters look great, it also allows for the use of in-game cinematics, as opposed to cutscenes, to convey important story information. For example, in one sequence a scientist walks by, then runs back the other way, chased by a monster. Then you see the monster turn back and run the other way, now chased by human soldiers. "The world has stuff going on," says Newell. "We can trigger it off with an arbitrary event, it doesn't have to be just where you're walking." But unlike a traditional cutscene, you are not a passive observer. If you get too close or start shooting, the characters will stop their animation and react accordingly. "From a design point of view, what we are trying to do is put some entertainment back into the game," says Newell. The artists and animators plan to add as many as 40 of these animations to the game.

> "Things just get really, unbelievably gory."
>
> — Gabe Newell, co-founder of Valve Software

The monsters are also varied — ranging from giant, room-spanning goliaths to flocks of bats. Looking across the *Half-Life* menagerie, the aliens really do look alien, and seeing a cloud of bats flying through the level is impressive, as if a researcher were demonstrating the flocking tendencies of real birds.

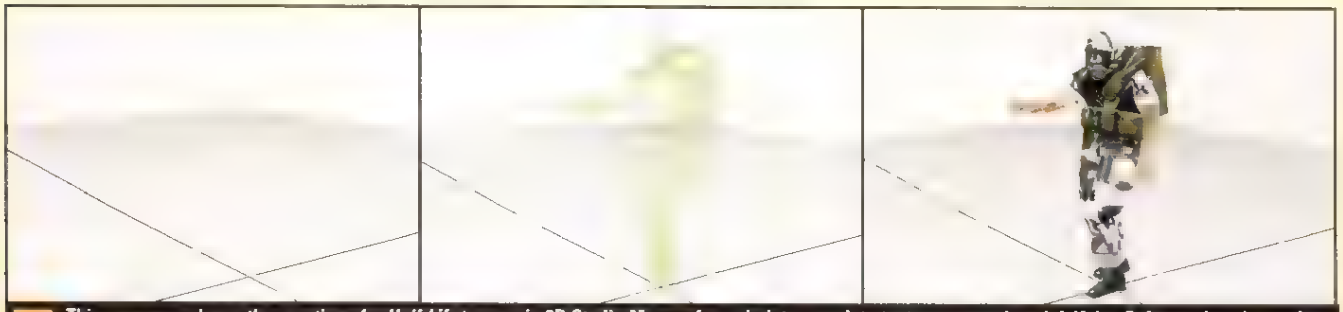
Game AI never seems to be what it could; even Kasparov has some words to say about Deep Blue, IBM's chess AI. But flocking is not the only proprietary AI going into *Half-Life*, says Newell. A variety of modules make the game look smarter than its rivals.

"We have monsters that are smart enough to retreat, go rally some friends, and come back after you," explains Newell. "The monsters can smell, so they can follow you through a level. Basically they're using this trail of entities in the world. Not all monsters can smell; not all monsters can see."

Even more impressive is the squad AI, utilized by the human soldiers who duck for cover, lob grenades off surfaces, and try to flank you while providing covering fire for their comrades. It's an impressive display. There's even a medic to heal the enemy soldiers.

Bloodstains and bullet holes

The game's world is nearly as dynamic as the monsters. Bloodstains are permanently drawn onto the wall, as are bullet holes, much like in *Duke Nukem 3D*



This sequence shows the creation of a *Half-Life* trooper in 3D Studio Max — from skeleton mesh to texture-mapped model. Valve Software is using a plug-in for 3D Studio Max called Bones Pro, which allows *Half-Life*'s monsters to have such elaborate and interesting animations.

"We have monsters that are smart enough to retreat, go rally some friends, and come back after you."

— GABE NEWELL, CO-FOUNDER OF VALVE SOFTWARE

After a certain amount of time, bored guards will spray paint on the wall, while parasites will come out of hiding and eat up dead bodies.

Apart from the visuals, the audio has new twists too. "Everybody has positional audio, but our echo effects are varied and realistic," says Newell. "If you're in a pipe, it sounds like a pipe. If you're in a pipe half filled with water, it sounds like a pipe half-filled with water.

"Those are handled through a set of BSP routines where you feed it normal control sounds with a set of parameters that characterize the room," explains Newell.

Half-Life will support multi-player mode, of course, and it offers a few new wrinkles. For one, a new weapon, the Gauss rifle, fires right through walls, making camping a bit tougher in deathmatches, and making it tough for people to camp out at the weapon respawn points.

Other weapons that should spice up deathmatches are the smoke grenade, which fogs up a room, and a tranquilizer gun, which lets you disable an opponent without destroying his equipment, because in *Half Life*, weapons and other entities take damage, so if you hit a foe with a rocket launcher, his weapons and ammo will be damaged. According to Newell, in deathmatch, with persistent bullet holes and bloodstains, "Things just get really, unbelievably gory," he says.

Still, most of *Half-Life*'s development effort has been put into single player gaming. "We felt that the opportunity was more for us on the single player side," says Newell. "We think that id is just going to do a fantastic job on the multi-player stuff. If we were primarily focused on the multi-player, we wouldn't have spent so much time on the single-player side." For fans of *Doom*-style games who relish the single-player mode, *Half-Life* should definitely be near the top of your watch list.

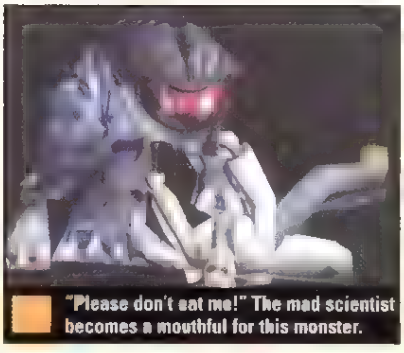
But what about the storyline? Okay, so it's not always that important in a game like this, and *Quake* got by without one. But this angle of *Half-Life* has not been neglected. Noted Horror author Marc Laidlaw has joined Valve as a full-time employee, lending his writing abilities to plot and dialog for this game and future endeavors at Valve.

Essentially, *Half-Life* is about a group of mad scientists who open up a portal to another dimension, which naturally triggers off an invasion of terrifying alien beasts shambling through the gate.

While that sounds like *Doom*, there is more to the story. Unfortunately, the mad scientists' lab happens to be set up in an old missile base with an active nuclear missile — and if the government agents succeed in blowing it sky high, they'll have a much bigger bang than they bargained for. So not only do you, as the fearless hero, have to stop the alien hordes, you must contend with your own government's incompetence as well

There's a lot more in this game than can be touched upon in this brief space — non-standard level layout, a bobbing effect in water, 16 bit color in software, 24-bit color in hardware, fogging, blurring, translucency, puzzles — so keep your eyes out for the demo coming soon and see for yourself. PCG

Ambient green light gives this hallway a sinister look.



"Please don't eat me!" The mad scientist becomes a mouthful for this monster.

Strange creatures are everywhere in *Half-Life*, and they will hunt you down like you're a dirty dog.

The New WorldCraft

Force feedback adds the sense of touch to supported games so you can actually feel the game. But a force feedback joystick isn't worth a dusty Pong if the stick is pulling processing power from your computer and slowing down your game. That's why the Microsoft® SideWinder® Force Feedback Pro has a [redacted] that does all the force computation on the stick. Which means your computer feels nothing, and your games are never slowed down. Force Feedback Pro is as much as six times faster than other force sticks. So you'll

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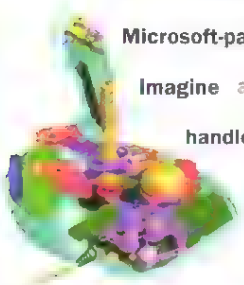
MDK: Mission Laguna Beach.™ The Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback Pro. It's designed so that everything in your game will be felt. But only by you. For more information (yes, believe it or not, there is more), go to



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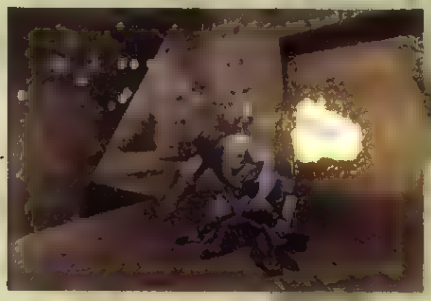

"Quake II, without a doubt, the game of E3."
—Computer Gaming World

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Product Information Number 89

Guardians: Agents

Finally, superheroes on the PC!

X-COM fans already know how addictive tactical combat can be, so the thought of duking it out with heroes that have super-powers is awe-inspiring.

— Joel Durham

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Developer: SimTex/MicroProse
Publisher: MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030-22454 (800) 695-GAME
Projected Price: TBA
Percentage Completed: 70%

In a nutshell:

Guardians: Agents of Justice is a turn-based, tactical combat game with an unique twist: rather than controlling soldiers, you command a squad of superheroes trying to protect the world from sinister, superhuman villains.

What's so special?

You'll have the opportunity to create your own superheroes, with 60 to 70 super-powers to choose from. Have you ever wanted to create your own comic book hero? Here's your chance.

Why should I care?

The superhero PC game is something that's been promised for years by more than a few software companies. It looks like MicroProse may be the first to actually deliver.

And when's it coming out?

Winter 1997

You wake to find the world is in the fear some grip of evil. superhuman forces. Governments are falling to their knees; frightened citizens are fleeing their homes. Who can we turn to? Who will save us?

That would be you, in MicroProse's superhero slugfest, *Guardians: Agents of Justice*. The long-awaited superhero tactical combat game, formerly known simply as *Agents of Justice*, is finally seeing the light at the end of the production room and this is after several delays and even a rumored cancellation.

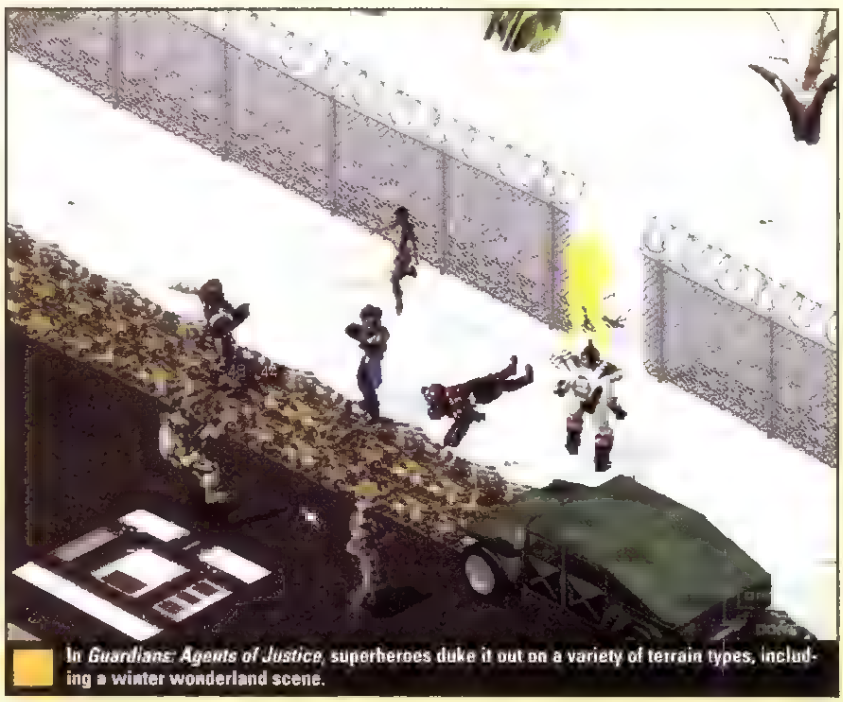
"We had to make a lot of changes for Windows 95," says Steve Barcia, the lead designer, explaining why the game has been in production for more than two years. "We practically redid it."

It certainly looks to be worth the wait. The idea of leading a squad of superheroes into combat against arch-villains is intriguing enough in its own right. Add to that the option to design your own heroes, choosing from an extensive menu of super powers; throw in a combat interface that's hauntingly similar to that of the phenomenal X-COM series; and top the whole thing off with both an intriguing single-player game *and* multi-player support; and you have a recipe for some delicious gaming

In the single-player game, you start with a single superhero. You'll have the option to choose from 24 ready-made heroes — but who's going to do that when they can create their own? *Guardians* offers a number of "templates" for your characters, to which you can add various powers depending on the criteria defined by the template The list of super-powers is exhaustive.

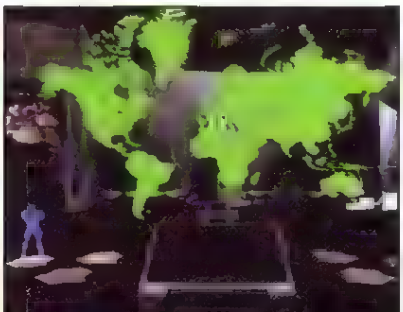
"We probably have close to 60 or 70 powers to choose from," Barcia says.

Your ultimate goal is to defeat three evil organizations bent on world domination. Each of the organizations has its own arch-villain, and it's your job to track him down. You do that by defeating one evil scheme after the



In ***Guardians: Agents of Justice***, superheroes duke it out on a variety of terrain types, including a winter wonderland scene.

# of Justice



The heroes of *Guardians* will battle evil all over the world as they seek out the three villainous syndicates.

Home, sweet home. Your base of operations is where you recruit and train your agents of justice in their fight against the evil supervillians.

other, which not only keeps the organizations from getting stronger, but gives you the chance to capture some of their lower-ranking villains on your way to nabbing the big boss

The three evil syndicates include the Shadowyn, a mystical group of villains whose powers stem from oriental folklore; the Tech Lords, a high-tech gang of robots who want to destroy every other mechanical device on Earth and rule humanity; and the Claw, an bioengineered evil race out to take over the planet. Each of the organizations will present its own unique challenges the Shadowyn is secretive, its goals elusive, and its minions are generally agile and harder to hit in combat; the Tech Lords' heavy armor will make them tougher, able to take a lot more abuse than the other groups; and the Claw will have no limitations on the range of powers their villains can use, so you'll have to be prepared for anything

Confrontations take place in turn-based, tactical style on an isometric, top-down view of the battlefield; hence the frequent comparisons to *X-COM* you'll see all over the place. The surrounding terrain will be multi-level and interactive, so you'll be able to burst through walls and reduce structures to rubble like any good masked marvel.

Guardians bears some obvious similarities to *X-COM*, MicroProse's alien-busting classic — but in this game, *you* play the funny-looking ones.

Besides kicking supervillain butt, you'll have to deal with a monetary struggle. Defeating the baddies will increase your fame, which you can use to either improve your headquarters or recruit other heroes.

Throughout the course of the game, your heroes' ability to use their powers will increase with experience. Each power will have ten experience levels.

"Every two levels, you get what we call a power mastery," Barcia says, "which allows you to modify the power into something special, like a fire blast that now becomes an explosion."

Guardians: Agents of Justice's biggest draw may lie in its multi-player capability. "You can play one character each, cooperatively," Barcia says, "or in a Battle Royale, where you can each take teams and go head to-head." *Guardians* will support network, modem, and Internet play for as many as six simultaneous contenders.

Barcia says he expects the sheer number of powers and the freedom to create your own characters to make for great replay value. "There's a lot here where players will be able to take and build the characters the way they want to," he says.

Don't expect to see the Hulk or Batman wandering around the world of *Guardians*, however. If you want to step into the pointy boots of your favorite superhero, you'll have to create your own approximation of him or her; MicroProse has no plans to license "real" comic book heroes for the game.

Guardians: Heroes of Justice looks like it has everything a crimefighting gamer could ask for. Only one question remains: will turn-based combat be enough? Real-time strategy is all the rage now - even the latest X-COM game can be played in real time. But if substance wins out over style, *Guardians* will strike a heroic blow for turn-based games everywhere.

PCG

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M.A.X. 2

Interplay adds real-time action and aliens to a killer strategy hit

This isn't just another *C&C* clone; it's a deep, zestful game with a look and flavor all its own. *M.A.X.* was a surprise hit, and this sequel promises to be even bigger and better.

— William R. Trotter

***M.A.X. 2* will feature new alien races with their own unique weapons, many of them combinations of biological and mechanical technology, like this mobile artillery unit.**

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: M.A.X. 2
Category: Strategy
Developer: Interplay
Publisher: Interplay, 16815 Von Karman Ave., Irvine, CA 92606 (800) 969-GAME
Price: TBA
Percent complete: 75%

In a nutshell:
Take on the role of a hybrid life form and try to liberate the galaxy from a ruthless conqueror. Classic ingredients, yes, but mixed into an original cocktail whose charm and vitality make it stand out from the crowd.

What's so special?
Tough AI, dynamic 3D terrain, free Internet play, exotic units to control — plus your choice of real-time or turn-based play, tied together with a zany sense of humor that doesn't get in the way of the drama.

Why should I care?
The original *M.A.X.* delighted critics and gamers with its finely balanced mixture of diabolical complexity and addictive fun. The sequel incorporates many improvements, as well as feedback from *M.A.X.* fans.

And when's it coming out?
First quarter 1998

The gripping intro sequence of *M.A.X. 2* both sets the mood and encapsulates the back-story on which the game is based. It's 1,500 years after the events depicted in *M.A.X.*, and the universe is still ruled by the ancient, ruthless Sheevat (The Destroyers). In the few regions not under Sheevat dominance, Humanity joins forces with an alien intelligence to form the New Alliance in a last-ditch effort to roll back the Sheevats

As the game opens, you actually see the process of that union: a graphically exciting spin through the human cortex, complete with firing neurons, the infiltration of strange alien dreams as the two intelligences meld into one hybrid being: part human, part cyborg, part alien. Your new consciousness awakens encased in computer controls and interfaces; the camera pulls in, and the view becomes the game's controls. Buttons and icons hum to life, and...the game begins.

There's an initial sense of strangeness, because the interface is — well, alien. In fact, it's *liquid*. When you move your mouse over it, the display ripples and fluctuates, as though you were dragging your finger over the surface of a pool of water. It's a nice touch, and you'll soon get used to it.

As in the previous game, you must construct and defend critical structures, manufacture and deploy a multitude of units, and juggle offensive and defensive strategies against a strong, aggressive AI. Combat sequences are intense and often highly imaginative in their representation. For all its complexity, *M.A.X. 2* is shaggy-dog friendly — the 20 tutorial missions (plus helpful input from your Advisor 'Bot) should make the learning curve a pleasure to traverse.

When the original *M.A.X.* was released, some gamers bashed it for not being another real-time strategy game — unfairly, since Interplay had never claimed *M.A.X.* was anything but turn-based. Still, the real-time verses turn-based debate rages on, and Interplay has covered all the bases with *M.A.X. 2*. You can play in three modes: classic turn-based, simultaneous turn-based, or real-time. Multi-player support lets as many as six players duke it out via

In addition to hostile aliens, indigenous animals range from pesky to dangerous.

modem or network, and Interplay is setting up a web site where owners can play the basic game over the Internet for *free* (there will, however, be a mod est charge for add on campaigns)

The game's overall scope appears to be vast More than 100 varied standalone scenarios are included, along with three six mission campaigns. One fourth of the ready-made missions will be "historical," letting players refight classic engagements fought by previous *M.A.X.* commanders; each of these will be framed by detailed introductions and summaries that let you see how well your performance stacks up against benchmark performances from the past

The Custom Game feature gives you total control over creating new games. You can select the planet and clan you wish to fight for, the starting budget, difficulty level, resource alloca tions, initial strike force, and landing zone. There's also a World Generator that lets you design planets according to your whim, using eight different terrain types. Based in part on suggestions from fans of the first game, the World Generator provides many levels of control, from the fine-tuned placement of single tiles to click-and-fill functions that lay in whole mountain ranges, coastlines, etc. If you don't have the time or inclination to micro-paint a custom world tile by tile, you can simply establish the basic parameters, then select Auto mode — the computer will pick the best, most logical tiles for you, then paint in the major terrain features accordingly

A mission builder completes this suite of utilities, letting you set up any desired combination of units, structures, and victory conditions. You can then send out your creation for play against human opponents, or you can immediately dive in and play against the computer.

M.A.X. 2 will feature some spectacular explosions and weapon effects.

A Chat with Ali

Ali Atabek, producer of the M.A.X. games, was the guiding genius behind Mindcraft, a doughty little company that went out of business at about the same time *PC Gamer* moved to California in March of 1995. He produced *The Magic Candle* roleplaying series (still considered a landmark by aficionados of the RPG genre), the classic sci-fi combat game, *Breach 2* (a precursor to *X-COM*), and the ahead-of-its-time *Siege*. A fellow of most excellent wit and civility, Atabek is one of the Good Guys of the gaming business. *PCG* recently enjoyed a long conversation with him, excerpted below:

PCG: What are some of your personal favorite features in the game?

AA: I think we've found the answer to the real-time/turn-based argument — you can have the best of both worlds in this game by playing in real-time until you want to stop and study the situation, then you can pause, issue orders, and resume playing when you're ready. I love the 3D terrain that morphs before your eyes, mountains rising and rivers changing course, that sort of thing. And I'm especially pleased with the new Spy Cam feature — you attach them to as many units as you want, and they'll send back a view of the terrain around them, including enemy units that suddenly appear. This will make it very tricky for multi-player opponents to "gang up" on you!

PCG: What are the major changes in *M.A.X. 2* from a designer's point of view?

AA: We really listened to feedback from the consumers. I think it's arrogant and presumptuous for a game company simply to impose its will on the customer — I mean, that's who we're designing the game for, after all. One thing we did across the board was to eliminate a lot of redundancies in gameplay, actions that turned out to be nothing more than busy-work. There were some extra steps in both mining and power production — you no longer have to do surveying before you can start gold mining, for instance. That surveying function really slowed down the early part of the game, and a lot of people found it annoying. So out it went. Basically, our aim was to eliminate anything extraneous, anything that slowed the action, while keeping the essentials intact. So many ideas look good on paper, but turn out to be impediments in actual play; we put our egos on hold and listened to what the players had to say. It's as simple as that.

PCG: What about the changes to units?

AA: We want people to play as either the aliens or the humans, so we redesigned the alien units to do, well, *alien*, things. Alien armored units might look like tanks, but they don't just rumble around firing shells. Some of them extrude gooey stuff that eats human units like acid, or totally immobilizes them. Units also change and mature as the game progresses. Newly created units act like kids, speak with squeaky voices, and then 'grow up' into adult units as time passes.

PCG: You're an industry veteran, an 'old-timer.' What's your take on the real-time versus turn-based argument?

AA: It's interesting; if you study the demographics, you'll see a clear line of demarcation. Gamers who are passionate about real-time are overwhelmingly a new generation of PC gamers, young adults who have graduated to the PC after being weaned on action games for Nintendo, Sega, and Playstation. To them, real-time *is* the norm. Gamers who prefer turned-based action tend to be older players who just aren't comfortable with the speed of real-time games and who generally prefer to play solo against the computer rather than online. I think perhaps the ideal way to play *M.A.X. 2* solo is real-time, at a moderate speed, but using the 'pause' command. But you can play this game in any mode that's comfortable for you; we cover all the options.

PCG: What's next for you?

AA: Interplay is going into strategy games in a big way. We're forming a division dedicated entirely to producing that kind of game, which is a big evolutionary step for the company. That division is called "Flatcat" — don't ask. One product you can expect to see in 1998 is a state-of-the-art castles-and-sieges game. Over the past three years, that old game, *Siege*, has achieved the status of a classic — it was one of the very first real-time strategy games and technically was way ahead of its time. With today's technology, we can do things we only dreamed about doing in 1992!

PCG: One final question: *is* there such a thing as a Pentagon "Extraterrestrial War Planning Group"?

AA (chuckles): Well, if there *are* hostile aliens out there, we have to be prepared to kick their slimy butts, don't we? Other than saying that, my lips must remain sealed. We don't want a visit from the Men in Black, do we?

Graphics — already one of the strong points of *M.A.X.* have been enhanced, especially when it comes to the effects of firepower. Flying sprites and projectiles hit with spectacular visual punch; damaged units smoke and burn more realistically. Dozens of new units have been incorporated, including alien units that you can seize control of, adding a new dimension to the strategic and tactical possibilities.

Special Unit and Grouping commands give the player a new degree of control. Units can be ordered to follow waypoints and carry out tactical orders at the end of their journey. Groups of units will retain formations assigned to them and carry out collective orders. If you want to surround a building, for instance, you no longer have to drag individual units into that formation - just draw a box around the formation and give the order. Units can be ordered to patrol a given area, guard other units, or go forth on their own to seek and destroy a designated type of enemy unit. The computer keeps track of all these assignments, and a simple keystroke lets you access them and change the orders as needed. If units are engaged in a repetitive process, you can give a "loop" order, and they'll automatically repeat the task until ordered to do something else.

AI refinements make for an even more bloodthirsty and insidious PC opponent than the one found in *M.A.X.* (and gamers who took that one on know it was pretty tough!). Seven AI difficulty settings match every degree of player skill, from novice to expert (the latter being a nearly impossible "God" level). More than 100 3D-modeled units are at your command.

One of the most appealing aspects of *M.A.X. 2* is the thread of twisted humor that runs through the game. Mobs of tiny, but very angry, aliens will swarm towards an undefended Constructor as it attempts to build Mining Stations on rich

This alien robot is a weapon that the human forces can capture and use.

ore deposits. Every unit will have a distinct personality, and will respond audibly when clicked on. You can define the initial "personality" (Normal, Humorous, or Deranged), but that personality will change to reflect the unit's state of mind

If, for example, a unit has not been used for a period of time, it may become restless and perform accordingly by yawning, snoring, whining, pacing restlessly back and forth, muttering to itself, or — in extreme cases — demonstrating how ticked off it is by suddenly taking "target practice" on friendly units in the neighborhood. Units that are suddenly spotted by the enemy may react with macho boasts, hysterical excitement, or whimpering fear.

New alien life forms include the perpetually angry Snow Beasts, the hugely annoying Hopperseals, the tiny but pestiferous Knibs (rabbit-like critters who love to eat power conduits), and Tentacle Plants, which drag unwary units into their centers and digest them for lunch.

Damaged or destroyed units don't just explode and disappear. There are numerous vivid detonations in the game, but the *M.A.X. 2* design document lists many creative ways to die, including the "Spinning Black-Hole-Whoosh," the "Puff Shake-Whine-Explode," and the "Spin Whoosh-Sizzle," depending on the type of unit dying and the type of unit that kills it

For all its detail and complexity, *M.A.X. 2* is designed toward a simple goal: "Our aim is to provide a game with the broadest possible range of appeal to the gaming market," says Producer Ali Atabek. "Strategy buffs can revel in its complexities and details, but it should also appeal to all those gamers who're looking for a 'quick fix.' They want to slide into the game, have a blast inside a cool environment, and get back out. Our goal is to create an environment that will accommodate that whole range of gaming interests."

As a final note of weirdness, Interplay's CEO, Brian Fargo (tongue firmly in cheek, we can assume) says he plans to offer free copies of *M.A.X. 2* to the staff of the Pentagon's "Extra-terrestrial War Planning Group."

"I am responding to President Clinton's call to bridge to the 21st Century," Fargo says, "and in light of projected budget reductions, I feel it is my duty as an American citizen to help my country. It's slightly ominous that NASA has discovered the possibility of life on Mars. If we need to be prepared to deal with all threats, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial, the Pentagon must have access to every resource."

It's interesting to note that, although the Pentagon politely declined free copies of *M.A.X.*, the game has developed a passionate following among the military rank and file; a goodly number of copies have already been shipped to morale officers with U.S. troops in Bosnia, and to individual soldiers all around the globe.

Make of that what you will.

M.A.X. 2, in any case, looks to be great fun. It's obviously a game with a strong, individual personality, and a far cry from the average me-too *C&C* clones poised to flood the market. PCG

The Beakers are a race of cyborgs constantly in search of new machines or life-forms to make their lives easier.

The Fen are members of a semi-aquatic race; they developed on a swampy planet and prefer hot, humid worlds.

The Phemer look like humanoid skunks; maybe that's why they hated crowding so much that they became big-time imperialists.

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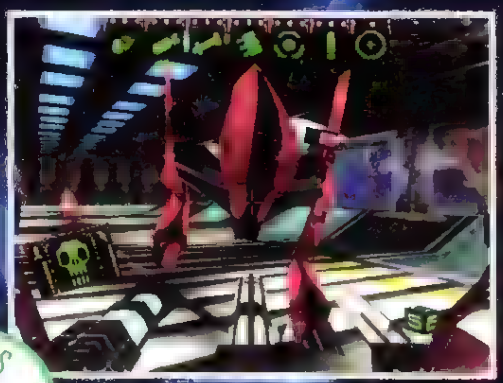

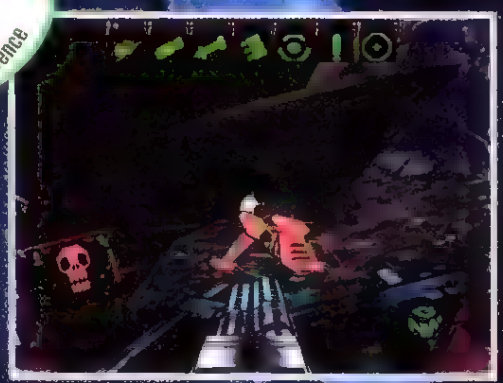

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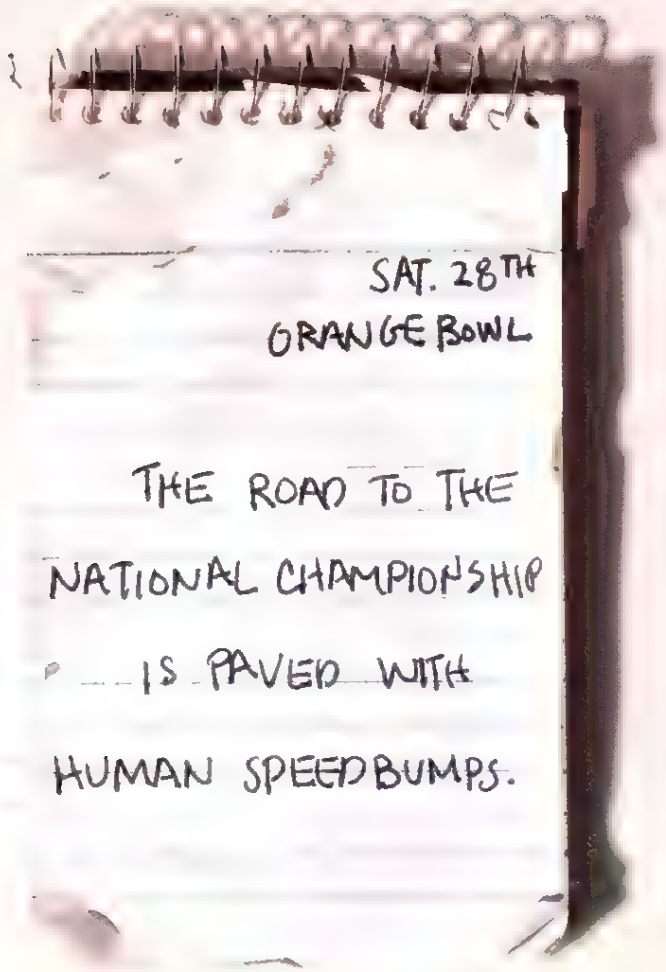

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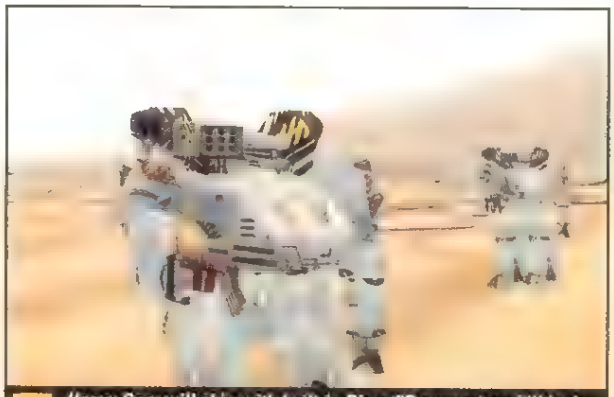
Heavy Gear

Activision takes its *Mech* tech into a new universe

The loss of the Battletech license won't stop the 'bot-bashing action; the technology and gameplay that made *MechWarrior 2* great lives on in a new game world.

— *Dan Bennett*



***Heavy Gear* will ship with built-in Direct3D support, so it'll look especially good if you've got a 3D accelerator.**

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Heavy Gear
Category: Action
Developer: Activision
Publisher: Activision, 11601 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1000, Los Angeles, CA 90025 (310) 255-2000
Percent complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

When Activision lost the rights to create games based on FASA's Battletech pen-and-paper game, its role in the MechWarrior saga ended. But Activision has secured the rights to an exciting new game system.

What's so special?

Many of the same people who created *MechWarrior 2* and *Mercenaries* are working on *Heavy Gear*, so while the setting has changed, the great graphics and gameplay are still in place — in fact, they're better than ever.

Why should I care?

You shouldn't — unless you're one of the countless people who loved the MechWarrior games. Battletech has found a new home at MicroProse in *Mech3* and *Mech Commander*, but it's Activision that has a gamer-proven track record in the giant-robot arena.

And when's it coming out?

Fall 1997

With 1995's *MechWarrior 2* and last year's *Mercenaries*, Activision established itself as the top name in the not too crowded field of giant robot combat. Sierra had its EarthSiege games, 7th Level had *G-Nome*, and there were a few other contenders in the arena of 'bot-bashing, but Activision kept the edge with a combination of sharp technology and unbeatable playability.

FASA, the company that created the Battletech pen-and-paper games that inspired the MechWarrior series, decided last year to take the brand elsewhere, effectively ending Activision's involvement with the MechWarrior series. Activision could've simply given its next giant robot game a new name and continued with business as usual. Instead, the Los Angeles-based company has licensed a whole new game world and made significant changes — and improvements — to its versatile MechWarrior game engine. The result is *Heavy Gear*, which could be the best giant robot shootout yet.

Heavy Gear takes its name from a relatively new pen-and-paper game Producer Chacko Sonny says the game's universe seemed the ideal basis for a follow-up to the MechWarrior games.

"It was beautifully developed by this company called Dream Pod 9 up in Canada," Sonny says "Very high production values in the books, and very good creative content in terms of having developed a story and a rich set of details to go along with that. These guys brought so much to the table creatively that we jumped on it."

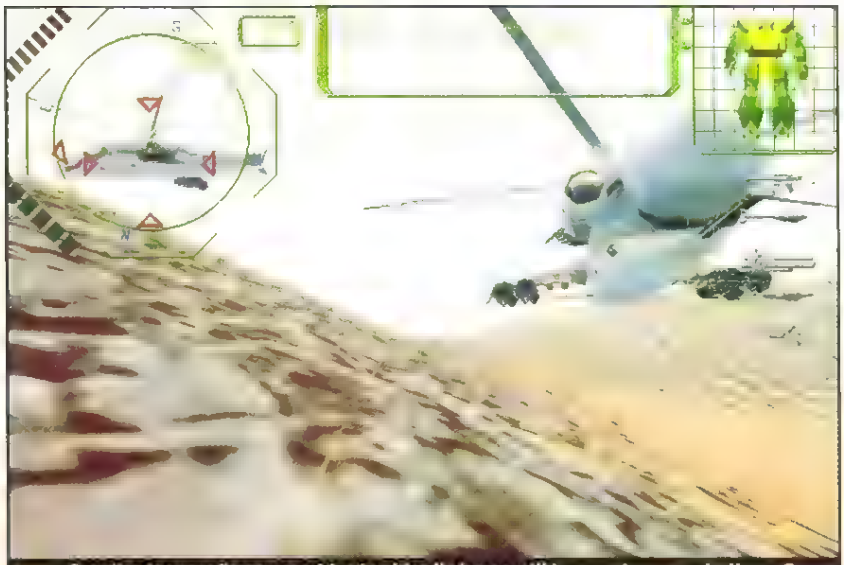
Sonny says the partnership with Dream Pod 9 has proved to be a fruitful one for both parties.

"It's a small company, and much like us, they just work all the time," he says "They're very passionate about it. They've also suggested a lot of things in terms of tie-ins between the computer game and the books. For instance, they're publishing a book in advance of the game that details the characters and the vehicles that are going to appear in the game. Likewise, some things will come out of our game back into the books afterwards. There's really a feeling of synergy between the two media."

Tim Morten, Activision's *Heavy Gear* director, agrees.

"This universe is still very young," he says. "We're sort of collectively fleshing out what goes on in that universe. These guys have been very open to making it a two-way street, making it

The 'bots in *Heavy Gear* will be very customizable. They'll also carry some of their weapons in their big mechanical hands, so it'll be possible to pick up a fallen enemy's guns and use them in battle.



Coordinating your firepower with other friendly forces will be more important in *Heavy Gear* than it was in the MechWarrior games. You'll be able to call in artillery strikes or air attacks from units like these choppers.

possible for us to bring some of our creative ideas into the paper-based game, as well as the other way around."

The differences between the Battletech and Heavy Gear pen-and paper systems should result in a fresh feel for Activision's new game. For starters, giant robots in *Heavy Gear* — known as Gears — are considerably smaller than Battletech's Mechs.

"Mechs are anywhere from 30 to 50 feet tall," Sonny says. "Gears are a lot smaller; 12 to 15 feet tall. These things aren't battle suits — they're definitely still combat chassis — but they're sort of like walking tanks; you sit in the middle of the chest of the Gear itself, and your head looks out of the Gear's head."

The size difference isn't just cosmetic, Sonny says; it'll result in significantly different gameplay.

"The scale of the combat is vastly different," he says. "You're not in these big, lumbering machines; the Gears can move a lot more quickly and a lot more anthropomorphically. The types of moves you can do are different."

For example: The robots in *Heavy Gear* will be able to sidestep and crouch behind obstacles, just like in *Duke Nukem 3D* or most other first-person shoot-'em ups. Another special move, called "skating," lets a Gear hold its feet still and rapidly scoot forward on treads; you can't turn very quickly when skating, but you can really close the distance on an enemy or make a quick getaway. Indirect weapons like grenades make these new moves even more important.

"With a combination of turning and side-stepping, you can do the equivalent of circle-strafing, much as you might in *Quake*," Morten says.

"You'll be able to do things like hide behind a wall, reach back, grab a grenade, and toss it over the wall at your enemy, who's hiding behind another obstacle," Sonny adds. "There's a much greater reliance on real combat tactics. In *MechWarrior 2*, a lot of times the tactical scenarios degenerated into two giant robots walking into battle, turning their torsos, and walking around in a circle, shooting each other. You can still do that in this game if you want, but you'll be a lot more successful if you use the different combat dynamics."

Use of combined arms will be vital in *Heavy Gear*, too. In some missions, you'll be able to call in artillery support and air strikes on a target. Sound tactical decisions will take on greater importance; do you take a stealthy approach to a target, sneaking in to identify it and then calling in attack choppers; or do you take out the enemy's air defenses, putting yourself in harm's way but giving your air strike a better chance of success?

Of course, all of these differences has meant making changes to the game engine that has served so well for *MechWarrior 2* and *Mercenaries* (not to mention *Interstate '76*). Just making the robots in the game behave like smaller, more agile Gears instead of lumbering Mechs required a lot of work.

"We actually had to rewrite our animation system to allow all the pieces to animate on all three axes," Morten says. "Once we did that, we were able to really make the animations fluid — we're even going to be doing some motion-capture experiments; we'll see how those tie to the [3D] models."

Game logic had to be rewritten, too, in order to work with the Heavy Gear universe's different weapons and damage rules. Other innovations, like continuously rolling terrain (as opposed to flat landscapes with the occasional hill) came from the thousands of gamers' suggestions Activision received in the wake of the last two Mech Warrior games. And still others, like built-in support for 3D sound, force-feedback controllers, and Direct3D-compatible 3D accelerators, were features the *Heavy Gear* team itself wanted to include.

Because the Heavy Gear pen-and-paper system was developed simultaneously as a roleplaying game and a strategy game, Morten says the PC version will place more emphasis on character and story line than the MechWarrior games did.

Heavy Gear takes place in 6132 on Terra Nova, a distant planet colonized by Earth long ago and pretty much left alone until recently. In the wake of a war against Earth forces trying to reclaim Terra Nova, the northern and southern hemispheres are at each other's throats. The game puts you in the shoes of one Lt. Edward Scott, a Gear driver stationed on a kind of land-based carrier in the badlands between north and south, when civil war breaks out. Edward is almost immediately branded a traitor and a pirate — and things get more interesting from there.

"For us, it's really a chance to be creative and make the game feel like a whole new experience," Morten says. "We're definitely of a mindset where we want to innovate, after having worked on the last two games."

If *Heavy Gear* was only as good as *MechWarrior 2* or *Mercenaries*, it would be a game well worth watching for, but it promises to be even better. If any game can make MechWarrior fans forget the Battletech universe, *Heavy Gear* looks to be it. PCG

Heavy Gear's designers reworked the *MechWarrior 2* animation system to allow for more articulated robots that can sidestep, crouch, and get back up when they've fallen.

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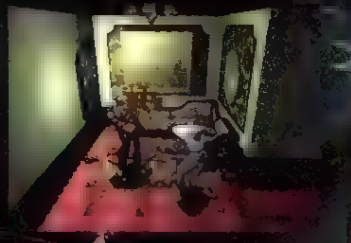

Arguably the best PlayStation game of all time is now available for the PC in its original, uncensored entirety. It's bloodier, more violent and contains all the gruesome, never-before-seen footage that was cut out of the console version. Part of you will want to uncover the grisly mysteries that dwell within. Part of you will wish you never set foot inside.

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Product Information Number 363

Riven

The game that never went away... is back!

Love it or loathe, *Myst* is one of the most successful PC games ever — and now it's back in the form of an even longer, richer, and more elaborate sequel.

— *Gary Whitta*

Want some idea of how much more details the graphics in *Riven* are, compared to those in *Myst*? *Riven*'s graphics take up six times the amount of CD-ROM space, making it a multi-disc product.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Riven
Developer: Cyan
Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment, 500 Redwood Blvd., P.O. Box 6121, Novato, CA 94948-6121 *www.redorb.com*
Projected Price: n/a
Percentage Complete: 90%

In a nutshell:

One of the most popular PC games of all time now has a sequel, much like the original but bigger, prettier, more ambitious, and addressing much of the criticisms aimed at *Myst*.

What's so special?

Even the game's developers can't put their finger on why the original was such a success, but if you liked the original, you'll like this better — *Riven* doesn't deviate from the *Myst* formula, and improves upon the puzzles and adds even more gorgeous visuals.

Why should I care?

Whatever the detractors say, can the millions of people who enjoyed *Myst* be wrong? If you want some exploration and puzzle-solving, you're probably better off with this than any of the sub-par *Myst* clones.

And when's it coming out?

Fall 1997

Pick up the latest edition of any videogame trade magazine, or *Entertainment Weekly*, and flick to the page showing the latest sales charts for PC games. There should be no really big surprises — well, maybe one. Chances are, *Myst* is in the top five. A game that was released more than three years ago is still in the top five — in fact, it's rarely been out of it. This is something of a mystery. *PC Gamer* gave *Myst* a whopping 95 percent rating back in its first issue in May of 1994, but to be honest, many of the current members of our editorial team just can't see what the fuss is all about. Opinion is split on a much broader scale — depending on who you talk to, *Myst* is either nothing more than a pretty but boring interactive slideshow with nothing to do but solve insipid puzzles (Author Douglas Adams describes the game as "a beautiful void"), or a wondrous, compelling and immersive odyssey of exploration and discovery. But no matter what *Myst*'s detractors have to say, the fact remains that people (including, curiously, an abnormally high percentage of female gamers) have been snapping it up solidly for the last three years.

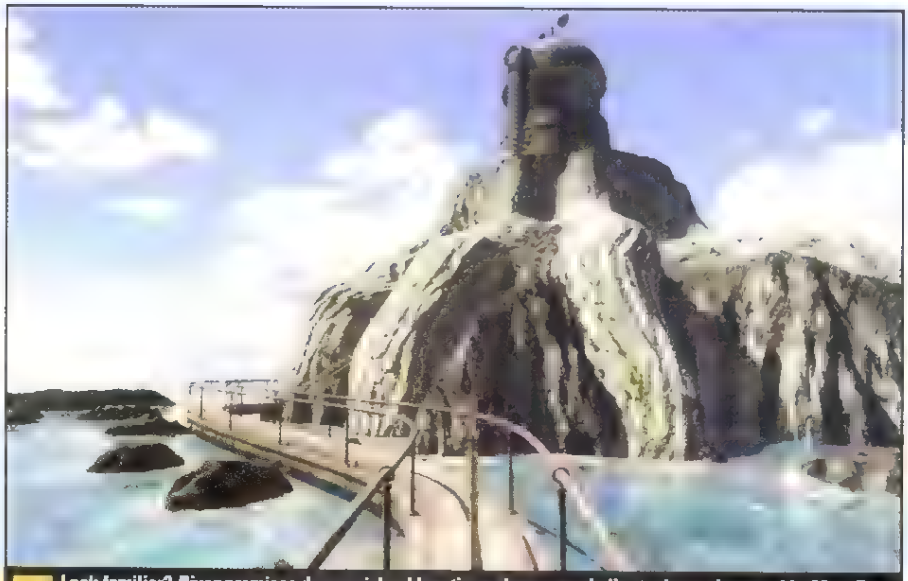
So what *is* the sequel of its success? You might think the best place to go for the answer would be the game's original creators, brothers Rand and Robyn Miller — but they're almost as mystified (no pun intended) as the rest of us. "We're surprised, to some extent that it was as successful as it was, let alone successful for so long," says Rand. "We basically set out to build a world that hopefully some people might enjoy spending some time in. The success of it all is very satisfying, but surprising nonetheless.

"As far as the secret of its success? First off I want to let people know that we're not presumptuous enough to think that it didn't have something to do with timing. The CD-ROM market was ripe for something like *Myst*, so some of the success is being the right product at the right time," he says.

"There are other factors. It stands out — it's not exactly following the mainstream game recipe. It's safe — it doesn't have any offensive content. I would hope some of the quality comes through so that people think they get their money's worth. The experience of playing hasn't faded much over the

Gorgeous rendered scenes like this are all part and parcel of the sumptuous *Riven*.

Just like in *Myst*, *Riven* will have plenty of scenes with mysterious objects you can interact with — but which objects, and how?



Look familiar? *Riven* promises dreamy island locations along very similar to these pioneered in *Myst*. But the world is now larger, and rendered in much higher detail. Fortunately, the opening puzzles are easier.

years, because the effort in developing *Myst* concentrated on the creation of the assets rather than fighting with ever changing technology to deliver them.

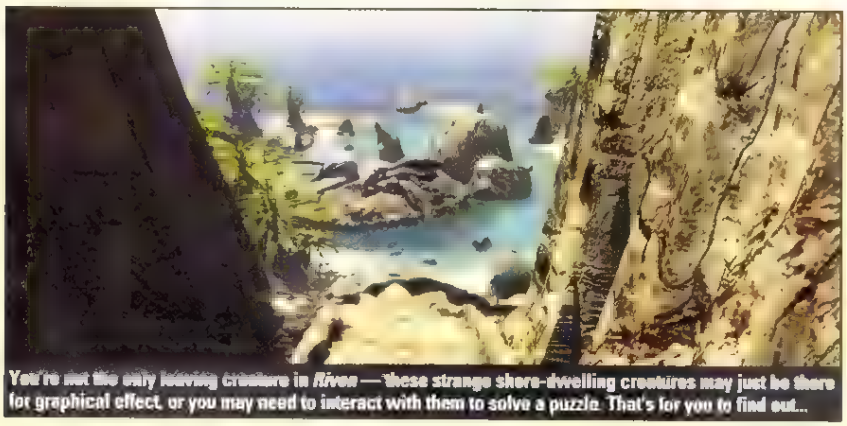
Of course, the upshot of *Myst*'s amazing success is that a sequel is now on the way. Robyn and Rand (along with a huge development team, much larger than the six-person team which worked on the original) are currently putting the finishing touches to *Riven*, an extension of the *Myst* story, and a massive expansion of its universe. Rand Miller, however, insists that *Riven* is not simply being developed to cash in on the original's success. "That's actually not at all how the *Myst* sequel came about," he says. "In fact, while we were developing *Myst*, we developed much of the back story and began to realize some ways to move it forward. In other words, fill in the blanks around *Myst*. The broad strokes for what would become *Riven* were painted long before *Myst* was finished. Even then we were tempted to not do the sequel, unless we could treat it as its own entity, something that would stand on its own, something that wouldn't look like a quick project to capitalize on the success of *Myst*."

So, sensibly, *Riven* does not deviate far from the successful formula that made *Myst* a blockbuster. It's still all about navigating through a lush rendered world in first-person, with each new view fading or dissolving over the last (with the occasional fully-animated transition) to create the illusion of movement. There's still little in the way of character interaction, and even less in the way of conflict or peril, giving the player time and space to explore as they see fit. Much of that exploration is open ended, but a linear puzzle path (you need to solve "this" to do "that" so you can travel "there," etc.) keeps the player on the right track. As Robyn Miller says, the goal with *Riven* was evolution, not revolution. "We wanted to take all we had learned from *Myst*, and make it better. There have been many areas that we've attempted to improve upon: sound, story, visuals, design, etc. But I'm really hoping that our changes in gameplay will be obvious to the player," he says. "There were two very clear messages that came through from our audience after *Myst* was released. The non-gamers said, '*Myst* is too hard,' and the gamers said, '*Myst* is too easy.' So... hmmmm, that left us kind of screwed. But I believe we've been able to address both these complaints. *Riven* is structured completely differently than *Myst*. There are no difficult obstacles right up front. Instead, the puzzles get more and more complex as you get deeper and deeper into the world. But, at first, the player gets an opportunity to just freely wander around and be drawn into, and immersed in, *Riven*," Robyn Miller says. "Actually, I hate to even call them 'puzzles,' because we've done everything within our power to not make them seem like puzzles. No one likes being forced to figure out some sort of arbitrary Rubik's Cube. Puzzles should fit seamlessly into the environment and into the story. They should make sense in the context of the world and the characters in that world. They should be there for a reason."

Much of the reason why *Riven*'s development team is so much bigger than *Myst*'s is the increase in the technical ambition of the sequel. Whereas *Myst* came on "just" one CD-ROM, *Riven* will ship on no less than six. Whereas *Myst*'s graphics were created using two Macintoshes with 24MB of RAM apiece, *Riven*'s were created with 12 Silicon Graphics workstations and four SGI "gigantimongo" servers with so much RAM that, Robyn says, "it boggles the mind." That's a lot of extra graphics, and a lot of extra detail. The game engine remains much the same, so those extra discs are primarily used to store the massive amount of more elaborate visuals.

And so, *Riven* is almost ready to wrap and should be released later this Fall. As for those of you hungry for still more *Myst* style action after this one, you may have to make do with one of inevitable *Riven* clones, as Rand says they have no plans for a *Myst III*. "No plans at all. At this point in *Myst* we had a good chunk of the general idea for *Riven* thought out. The fact is, *Riven* finishes the story that began with *Myst*. It wraps things up well. I think the idea of *Myst III* is not motivating for us right now, and what we run on is motivation and excitement. What we get excited about is some next big thing — unfortunately we don't have a clue what that is at this point..."

PCG



You're not the only leaving creature in *Riven* — these strange shore-dwelling creatures may just be there for graphical effect, or you may need to interact with them to solve a puzzle. That's for you to find out...

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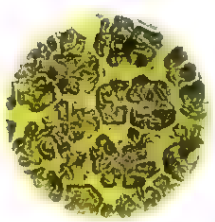

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Product Information Number 321

Starship Titanic

All aboard Douglas Adams' first-class graphic adventure!

The author of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* returns to the world of adventure games with the best-looking *Myst*-style game yet.

— *Gary Whitta*

Douglas Adams is the kind of person you only encounter once or twice in a lifetime, if ever an authentic, accept no substitutes genius. Doubters need only to look at his amazing body of work for proof *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and its three sequels remain some of the most inventive, and influential, literary science fiction ever penned, with his two Dirk Gently novels not far behind. He's one of the smartest, funniest living authors, and not just to read in the few times that I've interviewed him. Adams has come across as a razor-sharp wit his conversation, if a little scattergun, is made up of the kind of hilarious and incisive spontaneous observations that you really wish you'd thought of yourself

In recent years, post *Hitch-Hiker's*, Adams has re-invented himself as a literary visionary for the interactive age he was a key figure at Infocom in the late 1980s, when that company was widely held as the best adventure game house in the business. His *Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* game, co-written with Steve Meretzky, pushed back the boundaries of what was possible with text adventures, as did his next original game, the brilliantly frustrating *Bureaucracy* A dyed in the wool Macintosh zealot (but we won't hold that against him), Adams has otherwise been curiously quiet on the gaming scene in any medium, for that matter for the last few years. The reason? He's been hard at work in his new role, as "Chief Fantasist" for startup company The Digital Village, and with its debut game *Starship Titanic*

Adams actually "bowed out" from the world of adventures in the late 1980s, just as graphics, crude as they were back then, began to phase out the use of text in the genre. It's only now, he says, that

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: Starship Titanic
Developer: The Digital Village
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 (800) 910-0099
Projected Price: N/A
Percentage Complete: 95%

In a nutshell:

Starship Titanic combines the graphic splendor of the *Myst* genre with the kind of quirky storytelling and adventure game savvy that only someone like Douglas Adams can provide.

What's so special?

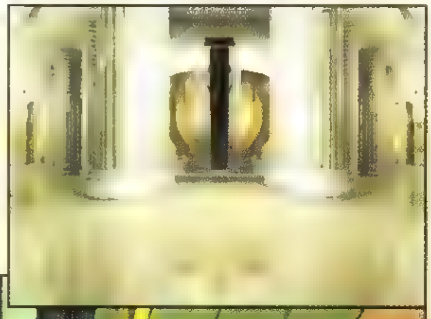
Adams is an adventure game veteran from the halcyon days of Infocom, and is bringing much of that experience to bear here, including a text parser interface for character interaction and a renewed focus on dialog and story. Plus, it just looks gorgeous.

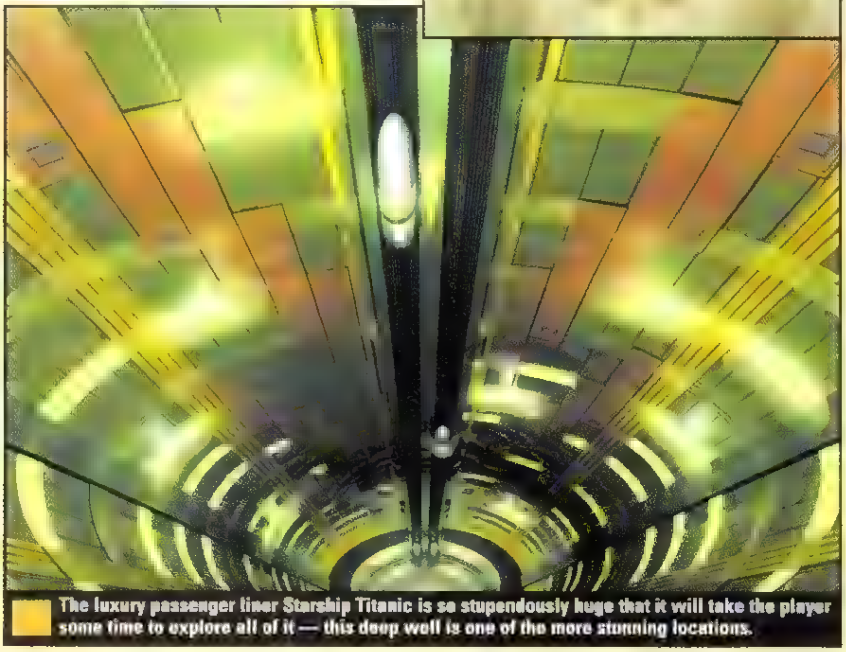
Why should I care?

In a genre full of boring puzzles and mindless meandering, ***Starship Titanic*** promises a compelling, funny story, original and inventive puzzles, and artwork that puts even *Riven* to shame. How can you say no?

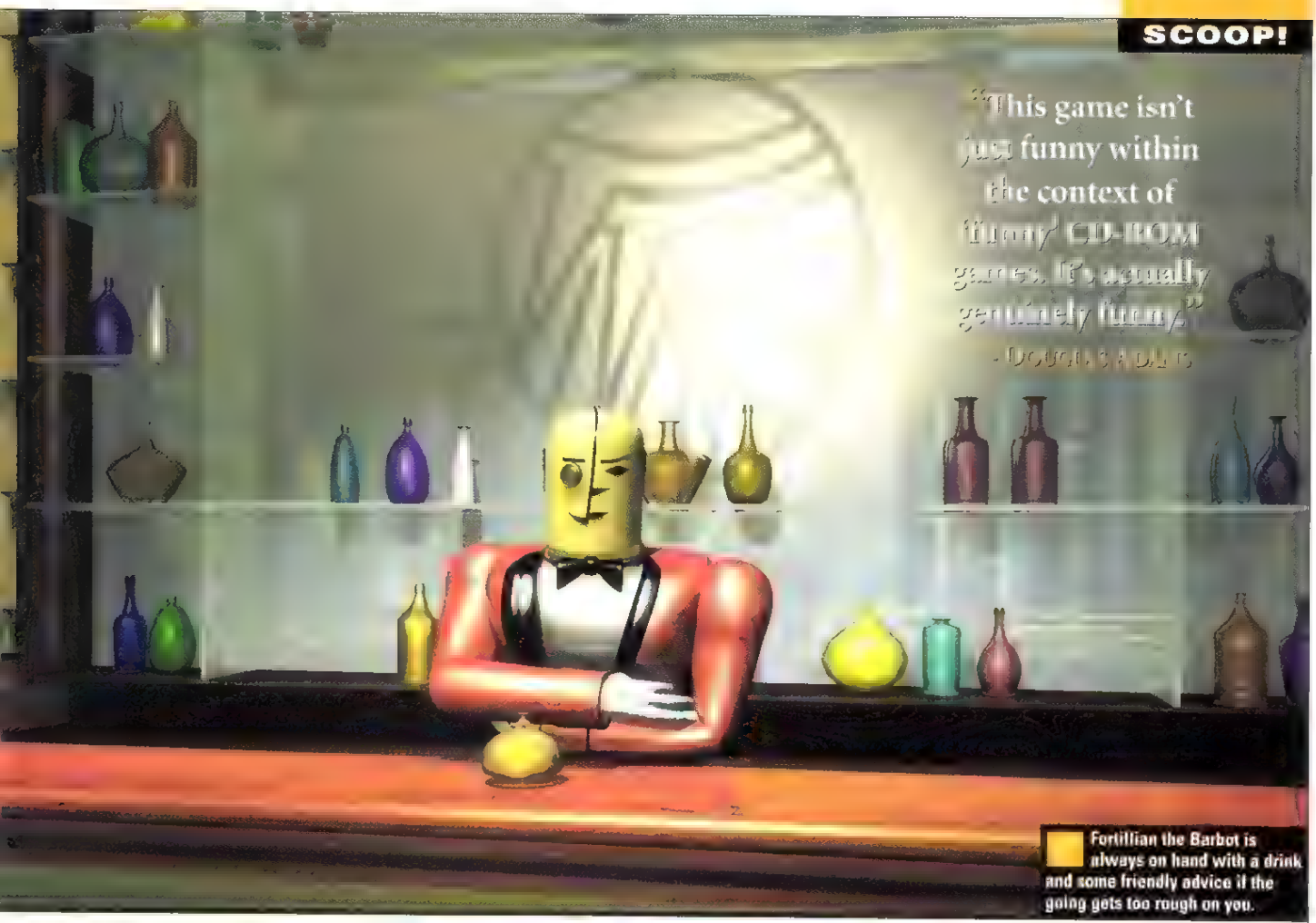
And when's it coming out?

October 1997.





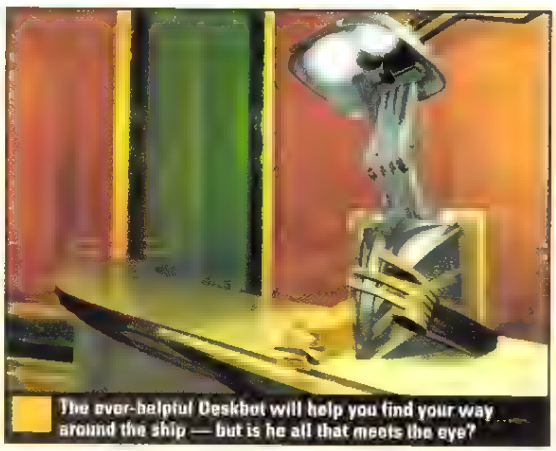
The luxury passenger liner Starship Titanic is so stupendously huge that it will take the player some time to explore all of it — this deep well is one of the more stunning locations.



Fortillian the Barbot is always on hand with a drink and some friendly advice if the going gets too rough on you.

computer graphics have reached the kind of sophistication where they can be just as rich and immersive as text, that he feels excited about getting involved again. Even so, he feels that the genre has much more potential than is currently being exploited. "These days, you see a lot of games with beautiful graphics, but the interactivity has been reduced to just pointing at things and clicking on them," he says. "*Myst*, for example, was beautifully conceived and designed, but within it, not very much actually happens. It's a magnificent and beautiful void. I felt that all sense of character and story was missing. So my idea was to do a graphic adventure, but one in which the graphics are used just as an environment for doing something which recaptured the real engagement of interactivity you used to get from the old Infocom games. The way we've done that is, you're in a point-and-click environment, but you really can talk to all the characters in the game. By that I mean you can type in what you want to say and you'll get a response appropriately."

The *Starship Titanic* story is pure Adams, using the devices of science fiction to poke fun at the eccentricities of everyday life — the ship of the title is a futuristic interstellar passenger liner, the most outrageously luxurious space-age cruise ship ever built. The Starship Titanic is billed as "The Ship That Cannot Possibly Go Wrong," but something definitely *has* gone wrong on its maiden voyage, and as a suspicious passenger, it's up to you to find out what. But first, your mission is to achieve what



The ever-helpful Deskbot will help you find your way around the ship — but is he all that meets the eye?

all consumer travellers have sought to achieve since the dawn of time — an upgrade to First Class. Adams himself, who stands six feet four inches tall, recently found himself stuck in Economy on a gruelling day-long flight to Australia on assignment for *Esquire* magazine, and his fruitless pursuit of an upgrade to Business Class was the inspiration for what grew into *Starship Titanic*'s storyline. *Hitch-Hiker's* fans may also recognize the luxury starliner idea from a throwaway line in Life, The Universe and Everything — since Adams wrote that short aside for the third *Hitch Hiker's* book, the idea has blossomed into the full-blown story behind *Starship Titanic*.

As the only passenger on board the ship (for reasons which are a little too convoluted to explain properly here — this is a Douglas Adams story, after all), all the character interaction is with the staff of robotic servants programmed to make your trip enjoyable. There's Fortillian the bartender 'bot (catchphrase: "If I can't mix it, you probably shouldn't be drinking it"), the receptionist Deskbot, the ever helpful Doorbot and more — and you'll be able to interact with them like never before, thanks to Velocitext, an intelligent language recognition system written just for this game. The whole system is driven by the innovative text parser of which Adams is particularly proud. But will adventure players really want to go back to typing, like in the old Infocom games? "Well, text, as we know from several thousand years of human history, is a very powerful medium," says Adams. "And with the rise of the Internet and E mail and chat rooms, people are finding themselves in a post post-moderm world, and are suddenly happy to type again.

"I do miss the days of the old Infocom games, because those text-based games were such a stimulant for the imagination rather than a replacement for it," Adams continues. "I think that we've recaptured some of that and combined it with the best elements of the graphics games, so you get the best of both worlds." Professional actors were used to record more than 10 hours of the game's

dialog, most of it written by Adams himself, ensuring a high level of humor throughout the game. "This game isn't just funny within the context of 'funny' CD-ROM games," he says. "It's actually genuinely funny."

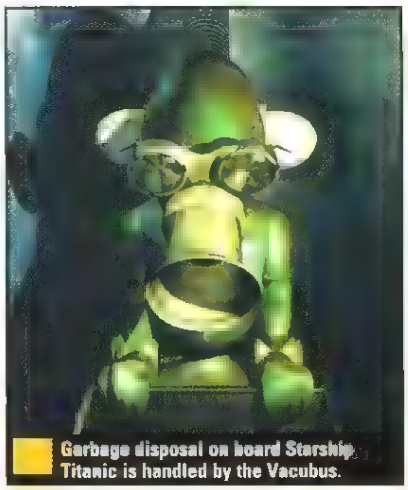
ADAMS ON THE WEB

For an online sampling of Douglas Adams' inimitable humor, you can check out the *Starship Titanic* home page, which can be found at *www.starshiptitanic.com*. Adams wrote much of the text himself, something that won't take you long to realize if you're familiar with his work. The page is set up as a promotional brochure for Starlight Travel ("We Unravel Travel For You!"), the fictional cruise line company responsible for building and operating the doomed Starship Titanic.

Adams fans should head over to Douglas' own home page at the Digital Village. The address is *www.tdv.com/html/douglas_a.ssi*. Among other things you'll be able to read a fascinating illustrated essay about Douglas' nose and see many of his previously unpublished writings.

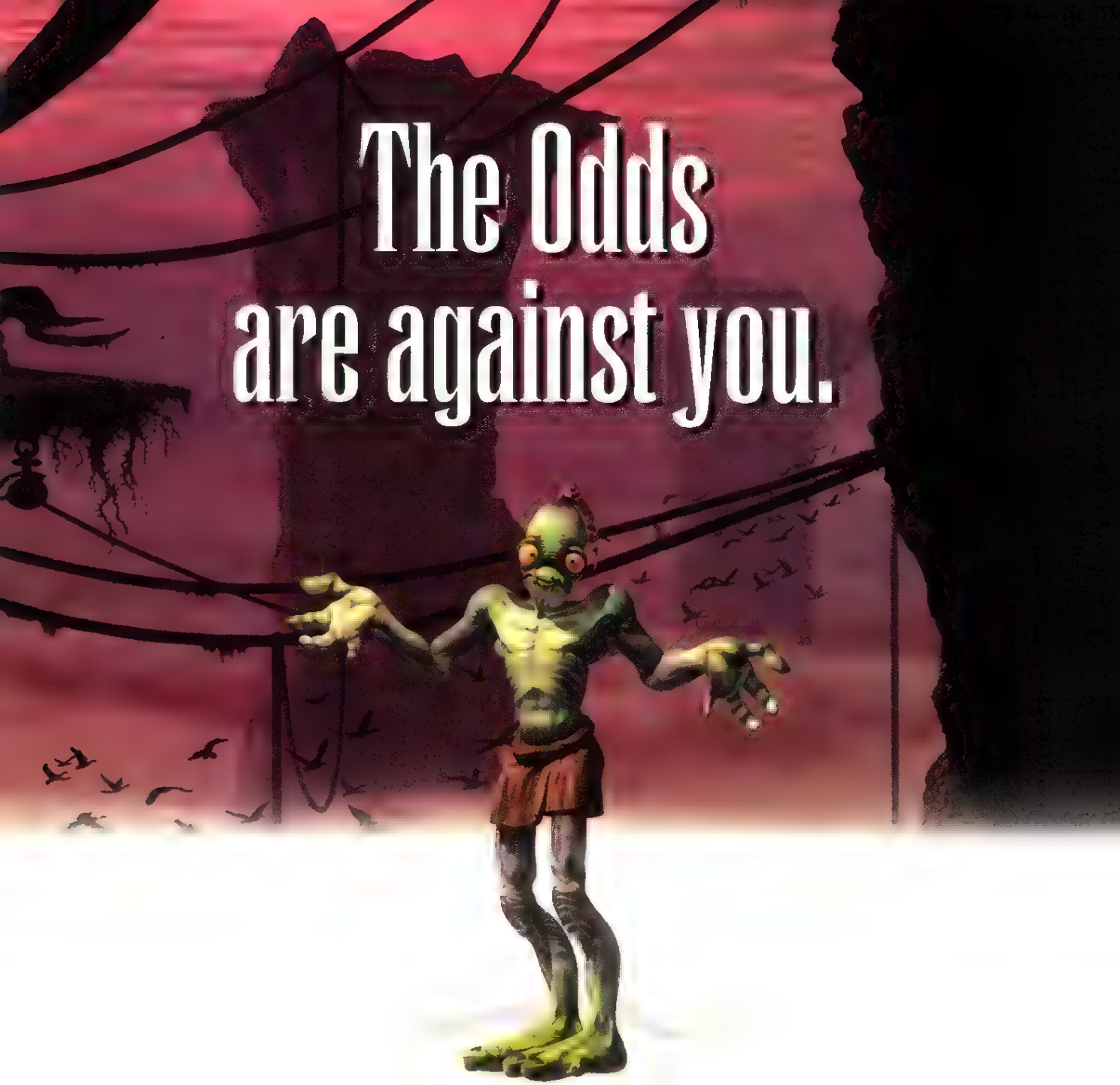
If *Starship Titanic* achieves its lofty ambitions and emerges as a fun, funny game, it will be due in no small part to Adams' commitment to the project — why do you think he hasn't published a novel in the last couple of years? "I've been working on this five days a week for the last 15 months," he says. "And I do want to emphasize that, because everyone seems to assume that I've done what most authors in this field do, which is hand over an idea or a pre-written book and just say, 'go ahead and turn that into a game.' But I've been steering and guiding and writing and directing this game all the way through. It's been an awful lot of fun. The thing I love about this medium is that it's so new and so open to invention, it's rather like working in movies at the beginning of the century, where virtually every thought you had was a new one because the medium was being invented around you."

Starship Titanic is set to wrap next month for its October 15th launch date, but the game's release represents the beginning of Douglas Adams' new gaming odyssey rather than the end. He has plans for at least three more games in the works, called *The Secret Empire*, *The Jobber*, and *Next Door But One*. Beyond that, Adams is already laying the foundations for an all-new, CD-ROM game of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* for Infocom (which he refers to as less of a game and more of an "illuminated manuscript") and, even more adventurous, an interactive return to his original radio roots with a CD-ROM game with *no graphics at all* — the entire game will happen in sound only. If this kind of idea came from anyone else, you'd dismiss it out of hand, but when Adams talks about it, you can't help but get excited. One thing's for sure — Douglas Adams is back in the gaming world, and the gaming world can only benefit from his return. PCG



Garbage disposal on board Starship Titanic is handled by the Vacubus.

The ship's Embarkation Lobby is where your adventure will begin — and you've already got a "bot" to deal with.



He's skinny. He wears a loincloth. He has no weapons
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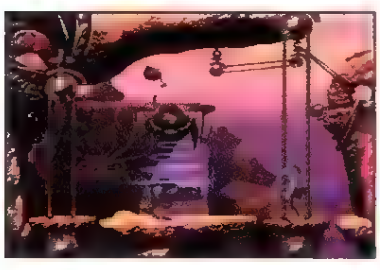

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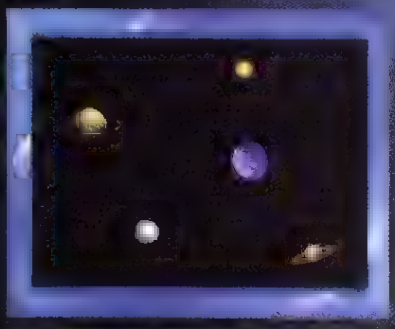

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21 adrenaline-pumping missions, each with their own terrain and objectives, plus a mission editor included as a free bonus.

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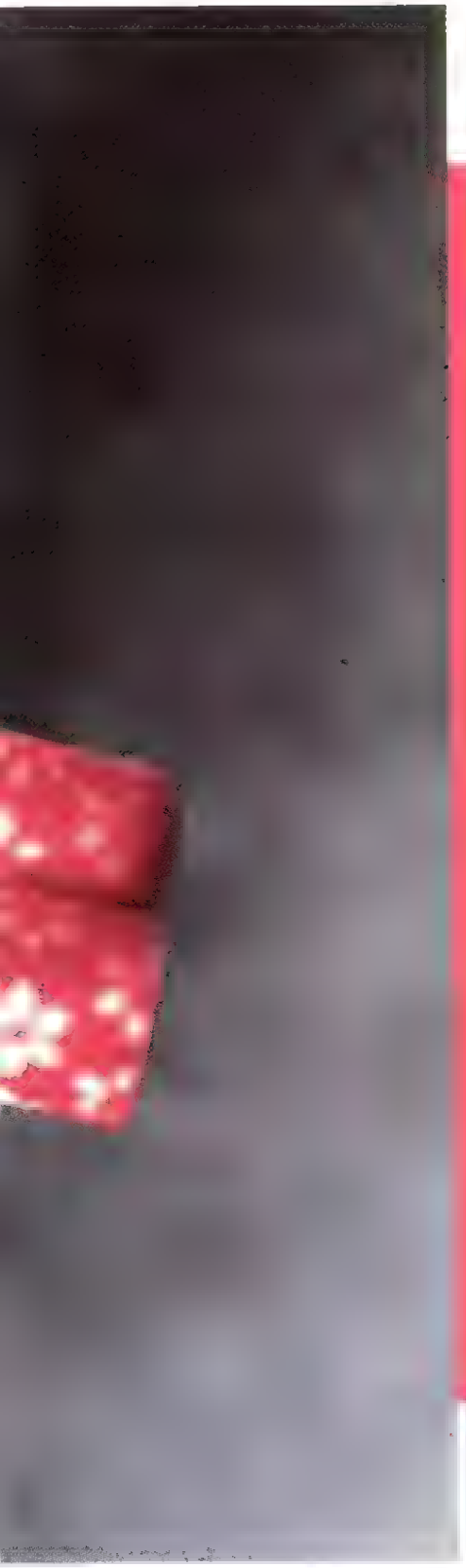

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Activision Wants Civilization

New Deal with Avalon Hill

Activision has announced that, through a new deal, the company will publish a series of computer games under the name *Civilization* — but MicroProse, understandably, is none too thrilled with the idea, since the name, of course, just happens to be exactly the same as one of its most prominent and successful brands.

In August, Activision acquired the rights to the Civilization license from Avalon Hill in an agreement that grants Activision an exclusive, unlimited ability to make computer games based on the Avalon Hill board game. MicroProse has previously published both of Sid Meier's award-winning Civilization games, which have sold millions of units worldwide. Both Activision and Avalon Hill claim that MicroProse's earlier use of the Civilization name was a one-time agreement, extending only to the original *Civilization*.

MicroProse's Civilization line may be in jeopardy because of a new agreement between Avalon Hill and Activision.

"Our understanding is that MicroProse was granted a limited license to make a game, which they licensed from Avalon Hill," Mitch Lasky, a senior vice president at Activision, told *PC Gamer*. "That product was *called Sid Meier's Civilization — Build an Empire to Stand the Test of Time*. It's our current understanding that those were the only rights granted to MicroProse, and that they don't have any additional rights."

This would seem to imply that the release of *Civilization II* was in violation of MicroProse's agreement with Avalon Hill, and that current and future MicroProse Civilization products could be a target of legal action. "We're currently evaluating that as well as other options with regards to protection of the right to the trademark bought from Avalon Hill," says Lasky.

This isn't the first time the two publishers have tangled. MicroProse snapped up the rights to the MechWarrior license from FASA once Activision's deal had expired, even though Activision had already published several successful MechWarrior computer games. Activision was forced to acquire the lesser-known Heavy Gear license to continue its line of futuristic combat sims.

Activision to Buy Raven

Game publisher Activision will acquire Raven Software for just over a million shares of Activision stock, it was announced recently. The deal makes Raven Software a wholly-owned subsidiary of Activision, and adds Raven's successful Hexen and Heretic properties to Activision's product line. Approximately 1,000,000 copies of *Hexen* and *Heretic* have been published to date. Raven co-founders Brian and Steve Raffel will stay on to manage the company's Madison, WI, studios.

Engage Slashes Staff

Looks to AOL, not Internet, for revenue

Online gaming service Engage has made a dramatic cost-cutting move, laying off half its employees. The cutbacks were prompted by tepid growth in Internet gaming, according to Engage president Jeff Leibowitz.

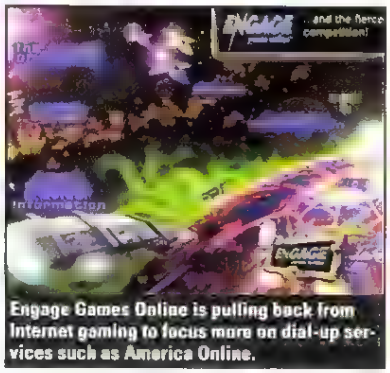
The service currently has about 100,000 active users accessing Engage through a variety of services, including Earthlink, America Online, and directly across the Internet. But though the AOL business is booming, the Internet gaming market has not grown as rapidly as expected.

"I think that the Internet business has proven to not exist yet, not only for us but for our competitors as well," says Leibowitz. "The market really hasn't solidified itself yet. There's confusion in the marketplace on titles, on pricing, and a lot of other issues." He notes that many of his competitors are also well below the estimated number of subscribers they hoped to have at this point. "As I understand it, we have about as many users as Mplayer, and they're in part free," he says.

Leibowitz dismisses the notion that the lack of a "killer app" like *Quake* or *Red Alert* is a problem for Engage, or that its pricing model ($1.99 per hour) is scaring Internet users off.

"I don't think that that is the issue," he says. "I think that the issue is that the market is simply confused, and not really there. Our AOL business is going great, because the market is cohesive on AOL — they understand what it is."

As a result, Engage is going to be much more focused on AOL as a source of revenue in the future, at least for the short term. The recent retrenchment will cut costs enough to allow the company to keep going until the time the Internet gaming market really takes off.



Engage Games Online is pulling back from Internet gaming to focus more on dial-up services such as America Online.

Engage is also expanding onto the other online services. The company is being tested on CompuServe right now and will be up on Prodigy later this year.

EA Signs Molyneux

Ex-bullfrog back in the fold

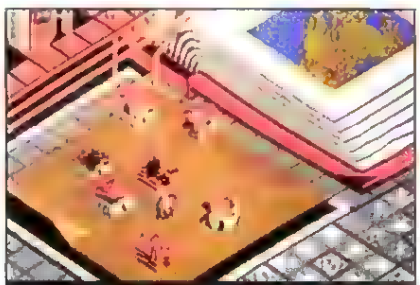
It's official — Electronic Arts has entered into an exclusive, worldwide publishing agreement for the first title from LionHead Studios, Peter Molyneux's new development company.

Peter Molyneux

"I'm tremendously excited to be starting over again," says Molyneux. "And I'm determined that LionHead's first release will be my best game ever. After all, the future reputation of the company is at stake. We had offers from other major publishers, but ultimately we chose Electronic Arts. Their experience in the computer games market and their global marketing and distribution network has made them the most successful computer software publisher in the world. EA was the obvious choice."

This agreement continues a relationship between EA and Molyneux that goes back ten years. Molyneux and Les Edgar founded Bullfrog back in 1987, and the two shopped their debut title, *Populous*, around to numerous publishers before Electronic Arts took a chance on the young English company. The game was an enormous hit, going on to sell over three million copies worldwide, and a string of other best-selling, critically acclaimed titles soon followed: the Magic Carpet series, *Theme Park*, *Syndicate*, and sequels to *Populous*.

In 1995, Electronic Arts bought Bullfrog outright, retaining the company's name and UK studios, but expanding its staff and product line. By 1997, Molyneux was feeling swamped, and, after completing *Dungeon Keeper*, departed for good. The new company is entirely funded by Molyneux, and according to him, will never employ more than 20 or 25 people — the expansion of Bullfrog into a major corporate entity was a major sticking point that led to Molyneux's departure.


Molyneux's first game was the ground-breaking *Populous*, which sold more than three million copies worldwide and spawned two sequels.

No 3Dfx Console for Sega

Cancellation catches 3D leader off guard

Sega and 3Dfx have broken off an agreement to use 3Dfx's technology in a possible future Sega console, code-named "Black Belt." Instead, it is believed Sega will develop a different console system, code-named "Dural" and based on NEC's rival PowerVR chipset.

3Dfx is investigating its legal options, both as to whether the contract was improperly canceled, and whether 3Dfx is now able to pursue console technology deals with third parties. Meanwhile, Sega has officially acknowledged that it will not utilize 3Dfx technology in future consoles.

3Dfx tried to downplay the announcement, though its stock price dropped considerably on the news. Sega's broadside came within a week of the chip company's very successful initial public offering (IPO) in July.

"We are disappointed with this notification and believe that it is without legal justification," says Greg Ballard, president and CEO of 3Dfx.

When he asks for a donut,

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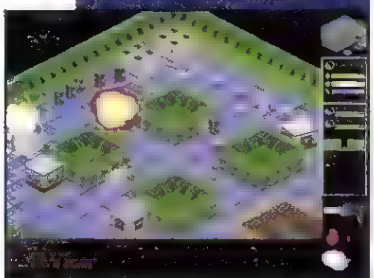
UNDER CONSTRUCTION

We may have gone *Quake II* crazy in the rest of the issue this month, but that's not to say there aren't plenty of other upcoming games more than worthy of our attention.

Here's a round-up of what to expect over the coming months, including — yes! — the latest batch *Quake*-killers...



Team play, voice technology, and gritty combat combine for a unique online experience in *Fire Team*.

FireTeam

Multitude Inc. is developing *FireTeam*, an online-only Internet game featuring team play and a third-person, isometric viewpoint. Supporting from two to 50 players at a time, the game is a fast-paced, squad-oriented combat action game based around a variety of realistic environments and story-based missions. Another interesting feature is the game's use of integrated voice technology, which should allow real-time voice communication between players using Internet voice technology, transmitting commands over microphone and modem. The game also boasts impressive graphics — 65,536 colors at 30 frames a second at an 800x600 screen resolution. The game should be ready this winter.

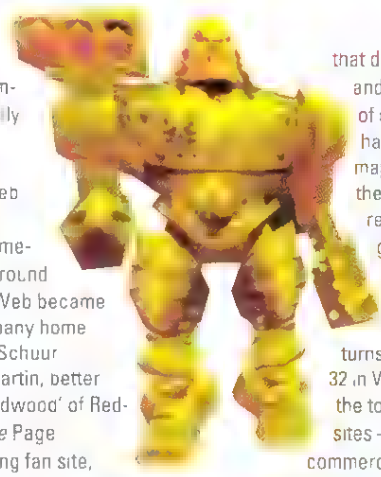
Blood 2

The budget and schedule have been approved for *Blood 2*, a sequel to the first-person shooter from Monolith Studios. The new game will use DirectEngine, a new true 3D engine developed by Monolith for Windows 95. According to James Wilson, the project leader, the team will be keeping several of the weapons,

Continued on page 84

Quake on the Web

Game's fans build community



One of the most prominent features of the *Quake* phenomenon has been its explosion onto the Internet in the form of home pages, dedicated chat channels, and massive ftp archives covering every aspect of the game, from level design and new monsters to tournaments, ladders, clan rings, leagues, and even comic books.

In fact, there are probably as many fan-created *Quake* web sites as there are sites for games from the rest of the industry combined, and the cottage industry that has grown up around *Quake* has got to be one of id's most powerful, and least expensive, marketing tools. Joost Schuur, maintainer of Slipgate Central (a search engine and directory of *Quake* sites), estimates that there are from 5,000 to 10,000 web sites devoted to *Quake* alone, of which about 1,000 are active and regularly updated.

So what inspires such devotion among the builders of these pages? Besides loving the game itself, *Quake* fans have been able to find each other and communicate easily on a scale unimaginable before the Web took off. "The *Quake* phenomenon started around the time the Web became a reality for many home users," says Schuur.

Sean Martin, better known as 'Redwood' of Redwood's *Quake* Page another leading fan site, agrees. "*Quake* has started a new era of computer games that are much more social in nature," he says, noting that hundreds of clans out there have brought people together into virtual communities. "It's like a second family to some people," says Brian 'Process' Sutton, a webmaster at The Stomping Grounds, another busy *Quake* site. "There is a real community online."

While many *Quake* sites are as amateurish as any other home page, the major sites — the ones that do daily news and provide tons of information — have become major players in the competitive realm of online gaming news. In fact, The Stomping Grounds turns up as number 32 in Web 21's list of the top 100 gaming sites — ahead of commercial sites such as Mplayer, battle.net, and Online Gaming Review. And the biggest sites are starting to see a trickle of revenue from ad banner sales.

To the creators of these sites, the reward is not primarily financial, but comes from the sense of a job well done. "It has to be a labor of love to put that many hours into it," says Martin. "I probably spend 30 to 45 hours per week on it." By day, Martin has a full-time job as a systems analyst with Compaq. "Basically, 'well rested' is not in my vocabulary," he says.

Major *Quake* Pages

THE *QUAKE* STOMPING GROUNDS
One of the oldest *Quake* sites on the web and still one of the most popular, the *Quake* Stomping Grounds includes everything from news, file archives, and hosting for Total Conversions as well as maintaining a list of active servers.
www.stomped.com

REDWOOD'S *QUAKE* PAGE
Part of the *Quake* Stomping Grounds, Redwood's *Quake* Page offers daily news and information on *Quake* and everything related to it. If John Carmack forgets to tie his shoes, you'll probably hear about it first on Redwood's *Quake* Page.
www.redwood.stomped.com

BLUE'S NEWS
Another site devoted to daily *Quake* news and one of the most popular and heavily-trafficked, Blue's News is as thorough and timely as anything on the Web.
www.bluesnews.com

SLIPGATE CENTRAL
Call it Yahoo for *Quake* — Slipgate Central lists more than 1,600 links to every aspect of *Quake*, from mailing lists and commercial expansion packs to 'bot home pages and skins collections.
www.slipgatecentral.com

PLANET *QUAKE*
Amazingly enough, even more *Quake* stuff, with interviews, a newbie guide, an ftp server, and a news page, the Daily Planet.
www.planetquake.com

And Some Fun Stuff...

CLAN DORK AWARDS
Do some *Quake* clans take themselves too seriously? Do they put up home pages full of bad grammar and incoherent ramblings? The Force Clan takes a look at some of this silliness and dutifully shreds it.
www.planetquake.com/forceclan/dork.shtm

ADVENTURES OF DANK & SCUD
Michael Houston's online *Quake* comic book, the *Adventures of Dank and Scud*, is still going strong and is now in its fourth issue. This time, the two *Quake* guys get mixed up with a strange clan — with hilarious consequences!
www.quakecomics.qc.ca/

THE *QUAKE* LITERARY GUILD
Do you have an urge to read classic literary stories re-written from the point of view a *Quake* deathmatch fragfest? The stories are all right here.
http://guild.time2quake.com/

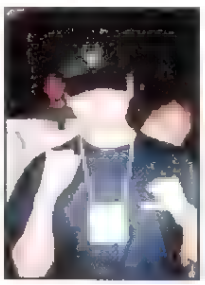
The Best *Quaker* Ever

Thresh reveals his secrets for winning

The world's top *Quake* player and recent winner of the Red Annihilation tournament that culminated in an E3 showdown attended by John Carmack, John Romero, and other *Quake* bigwigs is Dennis Fong better known as 'Thresh' to the many opponents who've had the misfortune to face him on the bloodstained battlefields of *Quake*.

Thresh is a 20-year-old business major from Hong Kong now living in the San Francisco Bay Area. He's taking a year off school to work on a new web site called Gamers Extreme and is writing player guides for both *Doom* and *Quake*. We had a chance to talk to Thresh about competitors, how to win, and that Ferrari.

PCG: It's E3, there's crowds and cameras everywhere, and a big prize John Carmack's Ferrari is on the line. Did you feel pressure?



Thresh: Oh, absolutely. The pressure to win is always there. It really comes down to who can perform best under such conditions. I think I had an edge being that I had past experience in big tournaments in *Doom II* and the like.

PCG: Who were your toughest competitors in the tournament?

Thresh: I don't think there was one person who stood out of the crowd considerably. I think every single one of the competitors was tough. I don't think any of them would have been there if that weren't the case.

PCG: Did you hear much about that east coast/west coast latency problem during the early stages of the tournament?

Thresh: Yep. I sure did. I even noticed the latency problem myself. Though I am on the west coast, apparently a lot of the routing comes through the west coast. During the first few phases of the tournament, my pings wouldn't drop below 400ms until around 1a.m. in the morning.

PCG: So, what makes you so much better than everyone else?

Thresh: I don't consider myself to be "better than everyone else." There are many other factors involved as de from skills. Confidence, what map is played, how you're playing that day... they all have a big part of whether a person ends up winning or losing. Luckily, it seemed my day was on the day of the tournament.

PCG: How much of advanced *Quake* is reflexes, and how much is thinking?

Thresh: Reflexes, of course, play a pretty big part of *Quake*. However, reacting correctly to your reflexes is just as important as having quick reflexes. You need to recognize where the shot came from and what's around you. Thinking, or strategy, I feel is the most underestimated part of the game. If you can outsmart your opponent, meaning surprising him or being one step ahead, you can beat him even though you may not be as skilled.

PCG: How do you have your *Quake* controls configured?

Thresh: I use W to go forward, A/D to strafe left/right, X to go backwards (yes, I know it's weird! I use mouse one to fire. Spacebar is jump.

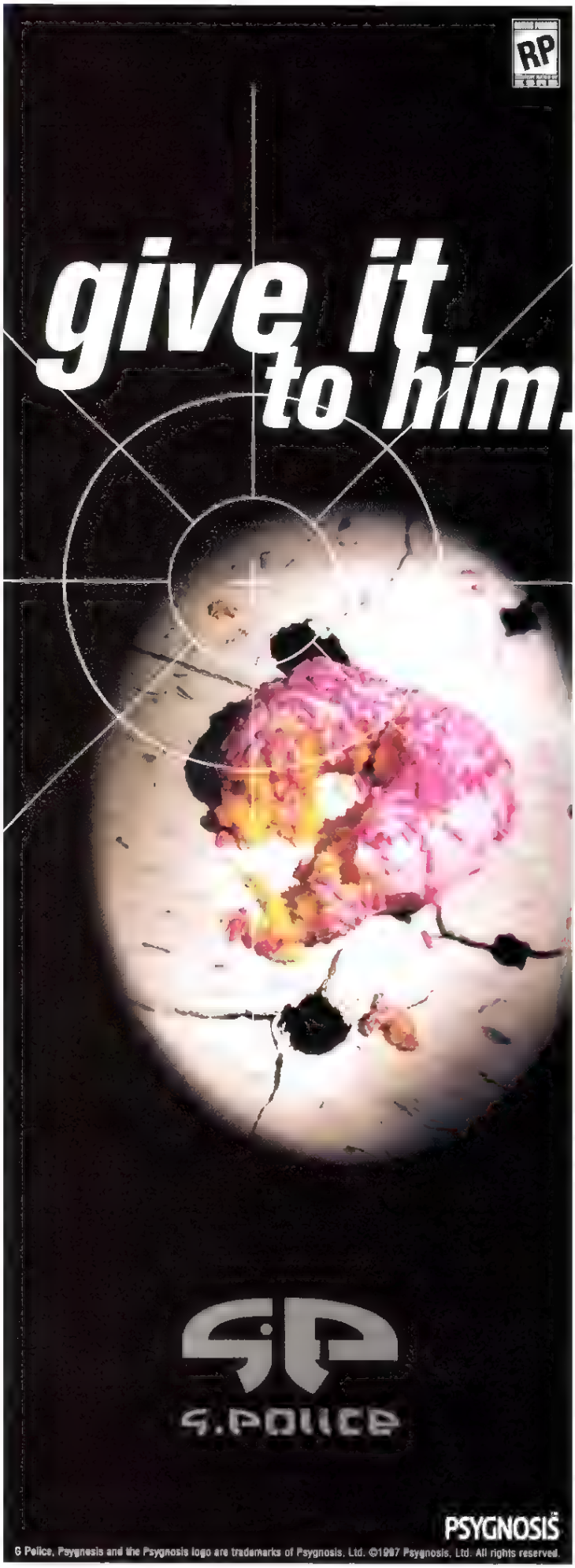
PCG: Do you absolutely, positively have to be a mouser nowadays?

Thresh: I think the mouse is still the most versatile controller out there for these 3D action games. I haven't found a joystick or controller that is as precise as the mouse, nor have I found a controller that has been able to match the ability to control the speeds at which you turn like the mouse.

PCG: Is the Ferrari worth more in the bank than on the street? Are you going to sell it?

Thresh: Well, the car is definitely worth quite a bundle of money. Unfortunately, due to California's state taxes, there's no way I can keep it. I will make damn sure, though, that the person who ends up with the car appreciates its

Continued on page 90
See Thresh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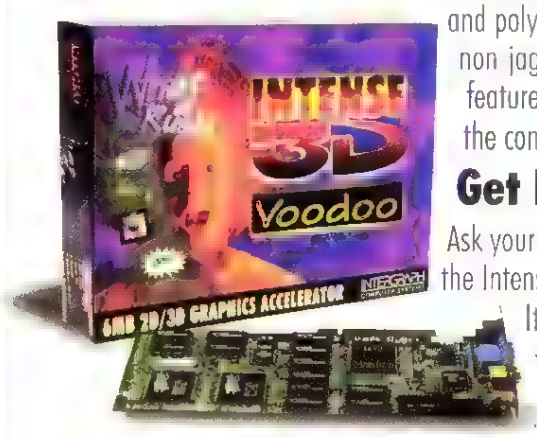

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Ask your local computer retailer for the Intense 3D Voodoo accelerator. It's a must have if you want to win the game!

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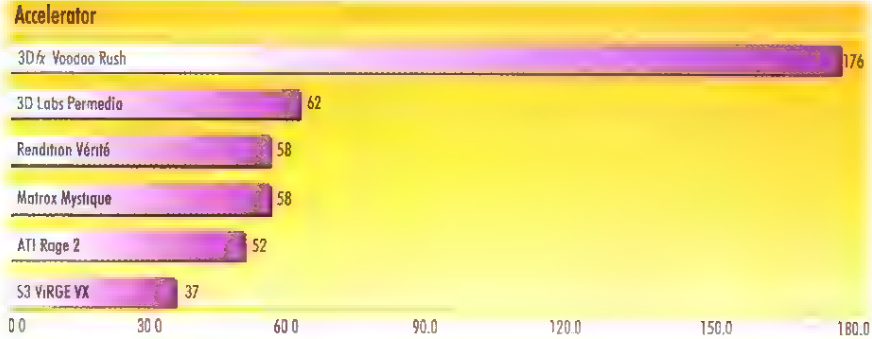


Windows 95 performance tests conducted by 3Dfx Interactive Inc. using Ziff-Davis® 3D WinBench® 97 on a Dell Dimension XPS H266 with an Intel Pentium II 266MHz MMX CPU 512K RAM cache 64 MB EDO DRAM 3.2 GB EIDE hard disk and 256Kb disk cache

Continued from page 80

one monster and the game's main character, Caleb, in the sequel. Wilson also says that although DirectEngine is currently hardware-only, the lead programmer is planning on a software version too, and *Blood 2* is expected to support both Direct3D and OpenGL. The game is slated for a late 1998 release, and it is expected that GT Interactive will pick up the publishing rights.

Monolith will cut a few more arteries and spill some more *Blood* with a sequel.

Blood — Plasma Pack

For those of you who can't wait until next year to get *Blood* on your hands, GT Interactive is prepping *Blood — Plasma Pack*, the only official add-on for *Blood* developed by Monolith. The pack will feature — of course — new levels, new bosses, new features, and new weapons. Meanwhile Interplay is working on an expansion pack for its shooter, *Redneck Rampage*, although no name, release date, or other information is available yet.

Riot

The first DirectEngine game — *Riot* (originally known as Metal-Tek) — will be out before the *Blood* sequel, and will be published by Microsoft. *Riot* is a true 3D, first-person shooter set in a world inspired by Japanese Anime films, such as Macross or Ghost in the Shell, and the player takes on the role of a combat soldier whose own brother betrays him. There are four different kinds of personal battle armor for

Continued on page 85

Classics Redux

New compilations reprise gaming goodness

A spate of new compilation packs have hit the store shelves, giving gamers a new opportunity to sweep up a truckload of classic games at bargain rates.

Just in time for the upcoming holiday season, MicroProse is releasing three compilation packs of some of its best games. The three packs — *Conquer the Skies*, *Conquer the Universe*, and *Conquer the World* — each contain four classic, award-winning games for under $30.

Conquer the Skies features *Falcon 3.0*, *1942 Pacific Air War*, *Fleet Defender*, and *Gunship 2000*. *Conquer the World* contains *Transport Tycoon*, *Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon*, *Sid Meier's Colonization*, and *Pirates! Gold*. Finally, *Conquer the Universe*, which is already in stores, contains *X-COM UFO Defense*, *X-COM Terror from the Deep*, *Master of Orion*, and *Master of Magic*.

Not to be outdone, LucasArts is rolling out *The LucasArts Archives, Volume III*. Comprised of a staggering amount of gameplay, the collection includes the complete versions of these classic LucasArts adventure games. *The Dig*, *Full Throttle*, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, as well as LucasArts' first sim, *Afterlife*, and the complete version of *Dark Forces*. If that wasn't enough, the pack also includes a variety of demos, including *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, *Outlaws*, *Yoda Stories*, and *Indiana Jones and His Desktop Adventures*, as well as the first ever demo of *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*. The package should be available by the time you read this.

LucasArts' adventure game *The Dig* joins a host of other classics in *The LucasArts Archives, Volume III*.

Finally, Sir-tech is getting into the collecion pack act with *Trophy Case II*, which includes three well-received adventure and roleplaying games from Legend Entertainment: *Death Gate*, *Companions of Xanth*, and *Shannara*. Each game appears on a separate CD.

Great Games Never Die...

...They just live forever on the Internet

If you've been around video games for a long time, the "old games in the story above might not strike you as classic just yet. For some of us, classic games may mean real industry antiques, such as *Wizardry I* on an Apple II, *Little Computer People* on the Commodore 64, or *Missile Command* on the Atari 2600.

But too many of those systems have seen the end of the road, ending up in trash heaps, Goodwill bins, or garage sales when a moment of cleanliness struck us, only to be followed years later by a lifetime of wistful regret.

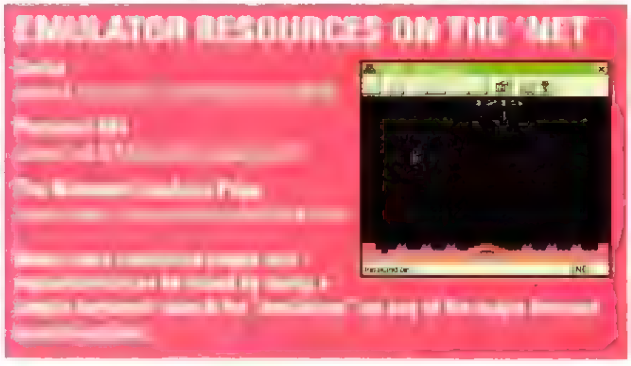
Never fear, a whole cottage industry has appeared on the Internet, offering ways for gamers to relive the gaming greats on their current systems. The magic word is emulators.

A host of emulators can be found out on the World Wide Web allowing you to create virtual computers such as the Apple II or Commodore 64 and run games from early videogame consoles on today's state of the art PC.

Emulators work by running virtual copies of the actual code in a special protected mode. In most cases, two things are needed — an emulator program that acts as the virtual machine, and something called a ROM, which is a bit of machine code that mimics the original game cartridge, and is, in most cases, the actual ROM code.

For example, to run many of the classic Atari 2600 games on your PC, you'll need to get *Stella*, the premiere Atari 2600 emulator. Then, from a variety of web sites, you can download the actual ROMs as tiny pieces of software, in most cases ported over from the original videogame cartridges.

Is it legal? Emulators exist in a sort of nebulous gray area along the outskirts of the law and on the fringe of the gaming industry. The emulator program itself is not illegal. Neither are the ROMs — provided you only download ROMs for which you still own the actual cartridges. But enough people have been intrigued that a hobbyist group has grown up on the 'net.



Shiny Summons the Messiah

Groundbreaking 3D game in the works

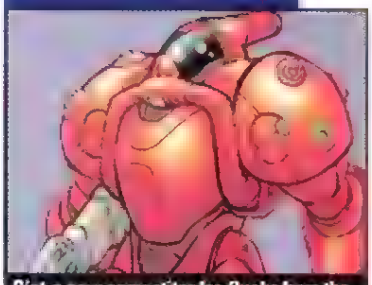
Drawing upon the rich mythology of Armageddon and the end of the world, Shiny Entertainment's next PC venture is an ambitious, graphical tour-de-force that combines cutting-edge 3D graphics with an Apocalyptic storyline.

Called *Messiah*, the game puts the player on the side of good and in the shoes of a tiny, winged baby named Bob — no kidding. From this powerless beginning, players then move through the world and use Bob's one power to possess other characters with in the level, which allows you to then use their abilities and talents to combat the forces of darkness.

The reason for this epic struggle? The Seven Seals that hold back Doomsday are breaking, and the forces of Heaven and Hell have been unleashed upon the mortal realm. As the Angel of Good, you are sent to combat darkness and maintain the balance against the minions of Hell.

Messiah makes use of an impressive new visual technology called RT-DAT, or real time deformation and tessellation, which stretches textures over polygonal skeletons creating a surprisingly lifelike movement and appearance for the game's characters. This, and the sophisticated animation sequences, real-time lighting and shadows, and a foreboding atmosphere combine to make *Messiah* a game to watch for.

Baby Bob takes flight in Shiny Entertainment's upcoming *Messiah*.



Riot, a new competitor for *Quake* from the team at Monolith, will feature true 3D by using the DirectEngine.

the player to suit up in, and a series of 40 different enemies. The game is being built on the DirectEngine, a 3D engine developed by Monolith and licensed by Microsoft. Also included will be DirectEdit, a level editor developed by Monolith. *Riot* is slated for an early 1998 release date, and would seem to be a natural for placement on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone.

Continued on page 89

THE KING OF BASS FISHING IS BACK!

Sammy USA presents *Jimmy Houston's Bass Tournament USA 97*, the *Ultimate* bass fishing experience!

Filmed on location at Lake Fork, Lake Richland Chambers and on Jimmy's own private lake, this 2-CD game offers tips from Jimmy in full-motion video. Add a full-featured practice mode and players can learn to fish like a pro! Players can improve or refine their skills in preparation for the tournament, which is modeled after actual bass fishing contests!

Enter to win a fishing trip with Jimmy Houston, by catching the "Golden Bass", hidden in each game!

It's the most realistic fishing game on the market, and the only fishing game approved for Windows 95.

Product Information Number 301

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Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

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The Baron

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is Back!

Over three years in the making, Red Baron II is an epic achievement. From gamer directed features to state-of-the art technology, it is the ultimate recreation of the men, machines and experience that marked the birth of aerial combat.

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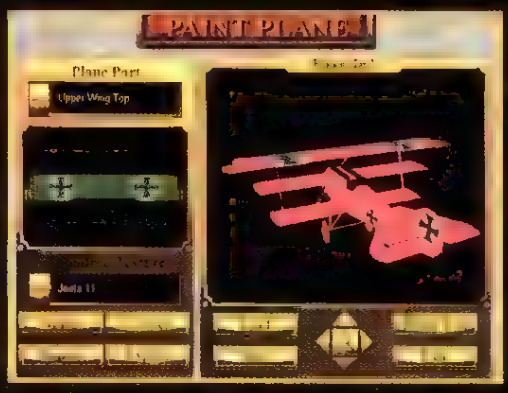
- Fly single missions for quick action or select Campaign play for a full tour of duty.
- Over 40 unique aircraft with 22 flyable planes.



- The Dynamix Mission Builder™ allows players to completely customize their missions.
- Dynamix's revolutionary new ACE AI™ system recreates the skills, tactics and personalities of historical and non-historical pilots with unbelievable realism.

- The Plane Paintshop™ allows players to customize the colors, insignias and look of their planes, using either provided patterns or by importing artwork of their own from any standard paint program.

Red Baron II

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RP

Blue Byte

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Product Information Number 101

Ares Rising

New challenge for Origin's Privateer

Space combat. Trading. Upgrading ships and weapons. These are the things that made Origin's *Privateer* such a hit with so many gamers. Yet for such an interesting design, the game has spawned only one sequel and very few imitators. There's Chris Roberts' upcoming *Freelancer* and then there's...?

Well, now there's *Ares Rising* too, and its comparison to *Privateer* is no idle one. Three of the principals in the new company, Imagine Design (not affiliated with Imagine Publishing) are ex-Origin ex *Privateer* team members.

Joel Manners, creative director at Imagine Design, worked on several Wing Commander games before directing and designing *Privateer*. Edwin Herrell, lead programmer and technical designer of *Privateer*, is also technical lead on *Ares Rising*. Finally, the creative director at the new venture is Gilbert Austin, who wrote for *Wing Commander*, *Strike Commander*, and *Privateer*. He also recently designed and directed *Harvester*.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the team is bringing much of its *Privateer* skills to bear in *Ares Rising*. The game has two main parts: an organizational phase, where you wander around your asteroid base, reading incoming messages, bidding on contracts, and upgrading and outfitting your growing fleet of star fighters. A complex, branching storyline offers more than 70 different missions to run through during the course of a game. Then there is the combat phase, which slips you into a traditional starfighter combat cockpit. A random mission generator and multiplayer options add to the depth.

This navigational map recreates the three dimensions of space.

The Imagine Design team is well aware that its game has strong similarities to the Privateer series, and will be trying to go head-to-head with the big Origin game and win away its fans. "The depth we've put into the Ares universe far surpasses anything we did on *Privateer*," says Gilbert Austin, the game's screenwriter. "Everything from the history of the universe down to each piece of equipment is fleshed out. I've easily written three times the amount of material that I wrote for *Privateer*, and I'm not even done yet."

This is an early look at the HUD in *Ares Rising*, a new game from some of the folks who worked on *Privateer* for Origin.

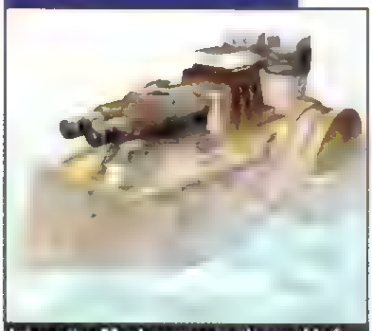
Edwin Terrell, the game's technical lead, agrees. "The in-flight world of *Ares Rising* is so much richer than *Privateer*'s. The combat is much more intricate, with new tactics, weapons and ship systems," he says. "But what's really going to make the game stand out is our superior technology. We'll have dynamic lighting and perspective-corrected texture mapping in a true 3D environment, all in 16-bit color."

Imagine Design has not yet finalized a publishing arrangement.

Stealth Reaper 2020

GT Interactive will be publishing a new flight sim based on the Joint Advanced Strike Fighter.

Continued from page 85



Interactive Magic returns to the world of space strategy with *Liberation Day*.

Liberation Day

Not too long ago, Interactive Magic released a game called *Fallen Haven*. Although the game received somewhat mixed reviews, the team that put that title together is back with a new strategy game, *Liberation Day*. Set in the same universe as the original game, *Liberation Day* hopes to pick up where *Fallen Haven* left off, but with some significant improvements. The Humans have rebuilt, after the pounding they took on Nu Haven from the Taurans, and they've launched a new strike force to try to retake the planet. Now this time around are more units, some of them programmable, a host of new structures, and five different races, instead of the original two. Developed by the French Candadian group Micromeq, *Liberation Day* should be available later this year.

Caesar's Palace

A new casino game is in the works from Interplay. *Caesar's Palace* is licensed from the famous Las Vegas casino, and includes digitized photos of the interior of the hotel. The game will include such casino staples as blackjack, craps, roulette, slots and video poker. Realistic casino options such as mukiple decks, double odds, multiple and progressive payouts as well as multi-player action add to the game's depth. Additionally, Interplay has signed gambling expert Dr. William Bertram to consult on the game in order to make it as authentic as possible. The game should be available some time this December.

PCG

News Briefs

Microsoft Ships DirectX 5.0

The newest version of Microsoft's API suite has begun shipping to developers, and might begin appearing on games soon Promised to be more stable than the DirectX 3 0, the new application programming interface is full of new features, including DrawPrimitive, force feedback support, and support for multiple monitors and the universal serial bus

Adeline for Sega

French developer Adeline has been purchased by Sega and will form the core of a new game company to be called Sega Software (not to be confused with the U.S.-based SegaSoft, in which Sega owns only a minority sake). The Adeline group, best known for *Relentless* and *Twinsen's Odyssey*, is expected to continue creating PC titles for Sega, as well as developing for Sega's next generation of consoles

Take 2 Buys GameTek Assets

Take 2 Interactive has acquired several assets from GameTek, giving the New York-based publisher a European sales and distribution office. Also acquired was Alternative Reality, a Canadian development studio, and the rights to some console titles

EA and Fox Team Up

Electronic Arts and Fox Interactive have signed an OEM agreement that gives EA the right to distribute Fox's software to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). These OEMs can then bundle Fox games with their computers and cards

MDK to Hit TV

Shiny Entertainment's *MDK* will become the basis for a television show. Vancouver-based Mainframe Entertainment plans to create an animated series based on the game to be ready in the fall of 1998

Correction

The review of Legacy Software's *D.A. Pursuit of Justice* in our August issue contained an error We reviewed the first of three cases that make up the game, an error that occurred as a result of the three cases being submitted to us separately *D.A. Pursuit of Justice* contains The Sunset Boulevard Deuce, The Gatsby Diamond Jewelry Theft, and The Rat Tattoo Murder cases We apologize for the error

The PC Gamer Playlist

What's hot at the magazine's offices this month.

Quake deathmatching made a serious comeback this month.

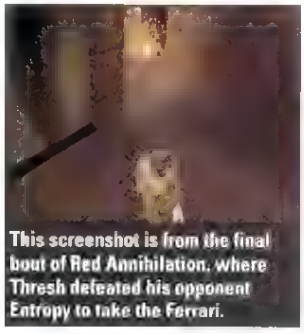
1.	[illegible]	Everybody
2.	[illegible]	Gary, Quintin
3.	[illegible]	Todd, Dean
4.	[illegible]	Joe, Todd
5.	[illegible]	Gary, Dan
6.	[illegible]	Jason, Joe, Joel
7.	[illegible]	Mike, Dan
8.	[illegible]	Joe, Quintin
9.	[illegible]	Joe, Dean, Gary
10.	[illegible]	Joel, Lisa

Thresh

Continued from page 81

value, not only as a car, but as a monument of online gaming

PCG What was the first computer game you got into?
Thresh: I used to play computer games here and there, usually teaming with my brothers to play *Police Quest*, *Ultima*, and the like However, the first one I got into seriously was *Doom II*



This screenshot is from the final bout of Red Annihilation, where Thresh defeated his opponent Entropy to take the Ferrari.

PCG So, which *Quake*-engine game are you looking forward to the most?
Thresh: All of the upcoming games look really awesome. The one that really caught my eye was *Quake II* *Daikatana* and *Sin* both look really nice too

PCG How closely do you follow the *Quake* community — do you read a daily news page, or do level design?
Thresh: I used to just play, but recently I have been getting more and more involved in the *Quake* community. I now check Blue's News quite regularly I have helped my younger brother with ideas to make maps, but I have never really gotten into the actual technical aspect of it. After getting a sneak peek at some of the upcoming games, though, and their beautiful architecture, I've grown quite interested in level designs. I've always known what works in a level and what makes certain levels fun, but it was not until recently that I've even attempted to make my own level. I'm learning slowly

PCG What's this *Ultimate Guide to Quake* you're putting together?
Thresh: Well, a couple years ago, my older brother, Lyle, and I started writing a book on *Doom II* strategies and tips, called the *Doom II Deathmatcher's Bible* We felt that it was about time some of the good players shared their secrets with the rest of the guys. Unfortunately, we stopped about three quarters of the way through, due to the lack of time. Recently, I finished off the *Doom II Bible*, and am finishing up one for *Quake*. It has all of my tips, trade secrets, and strategies in it, and I hope that it will be of help to players of all skills. I believe that the better the players are, the more competition there'll be, and the more fun it'll be

Thresh and John Carmack celebrate the conclusion of the Red Annihilation tournament.

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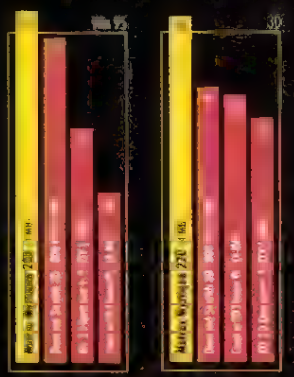

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Product Information Number 91

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* Estimated street price. To use Rainbow Runner Studio you require a Matrox Mystique or Mystique 220 graphics accelerator. All performance tests conducted by Matrox Graphics Inc. Windows 95 tests conducted on a Dell XPS H266 configured with an Intel Pentium® II, 266 Mhz processor with 512K cache and 32 MB RAM. Matrox Mystique 220, Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 Pro, Creative 3D Blaster PCI and ATI 3D Xpression + PC2TV were configured with 4MB of memory using driver revisions 3.63, 4.03.00.3211, 4.02.0204 and 4.03.2162 respectively. WinBench 97 business tests conducted at 1024x768 @ 16-bit at 75 Hz using small fonts under Windows 95. 3D WinBench 97 tests conducted at default resolution of 640x480 @ 16-bits at 75 Hz with DirectX™ 5.0 using small fonts under Windows 95. 3D WinBench settings were dictated by Quality Suite responses for the respective products.

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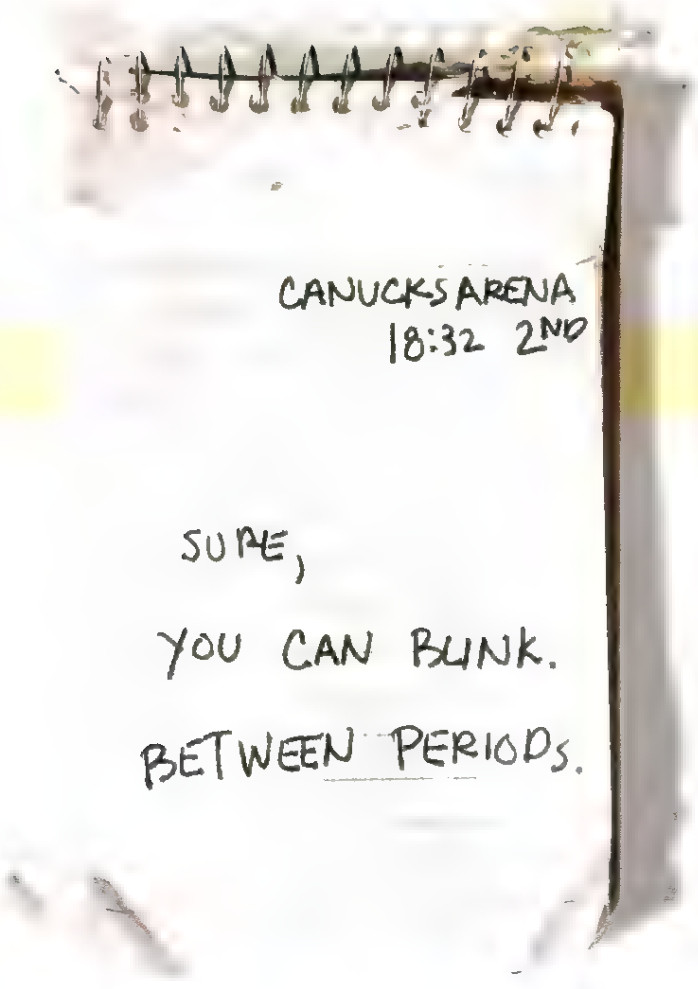

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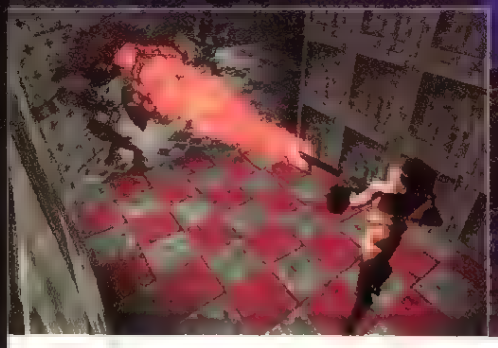
Product Information Number 146

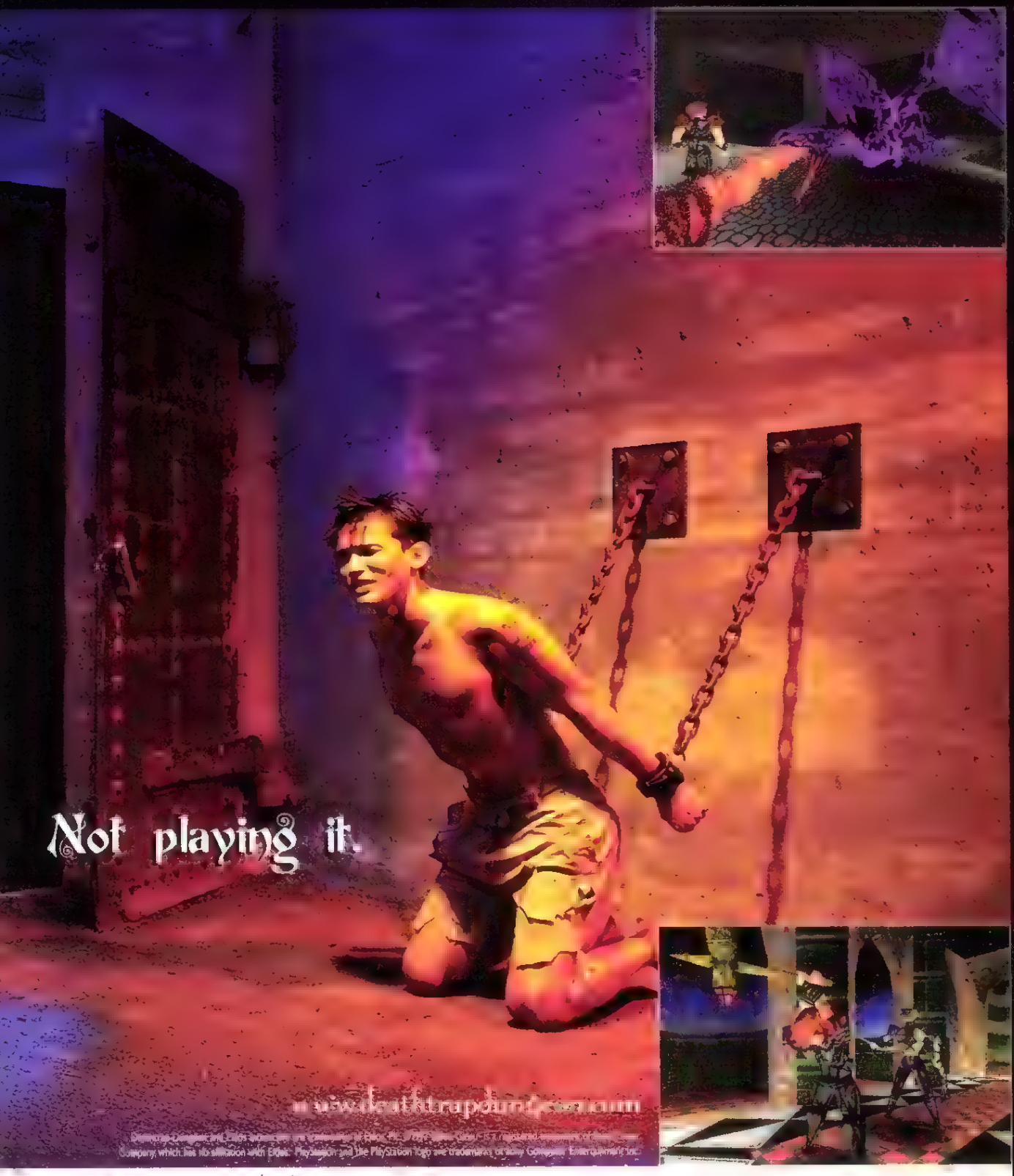
There's only one thing more torturous than playing Deathtrap Dungeon.



-IAN LIVINGSTONE'S-

DEATHTRAP Dungeon

"Beat me. Whip me. Just don't hit that Quit button." Consider it your battle cry. Then bring on the skeletal warriors, zombies and countless other undead denizens. Each one is another chance to slice and dice like a Ginsu® knife gone bad. Or simply cast a spell



on the evil priestess who's done you wrong. Because in this cavernous maze of devious traps, it's all about cheating death at every turn, blurring that fine line between pleasure and pain. And just when you think you can't take it anymore, consider the alternative.

PC CD

PlayStation

EIDOS

INTERACTIVE

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Product Information Number 132

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has ever unveiled

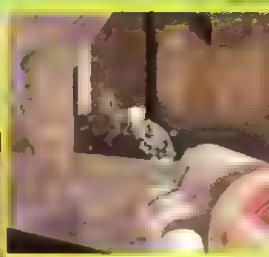
NO

Product Information Number 314

One year after Quake shook PC gaming to its very foundations, **THE SEQUEL IS NEARING COMPLETION** at the hands of John Carmack and his crack team at id Software. Promising stagger-

ingly detailed new worlds, **GENIUS CREATURE AI**, all-new weapons, a renewed focus on the single-player game, and **200-PLAYER DEATHMATCHES** including a built-in Capture The Flag game, **QUAKE II IS NOT JUST AN UPGRADE**. It's an entire, new game a generation above and

beyond anything you've ever seen before. **PC GAMER WAS THE ONLY MAGAZINE** in the world invited inside id's offices for an **EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON PREVIEW** and rare interviews with Carmack and id's inner circle.



BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

THIS IS QUAKE II

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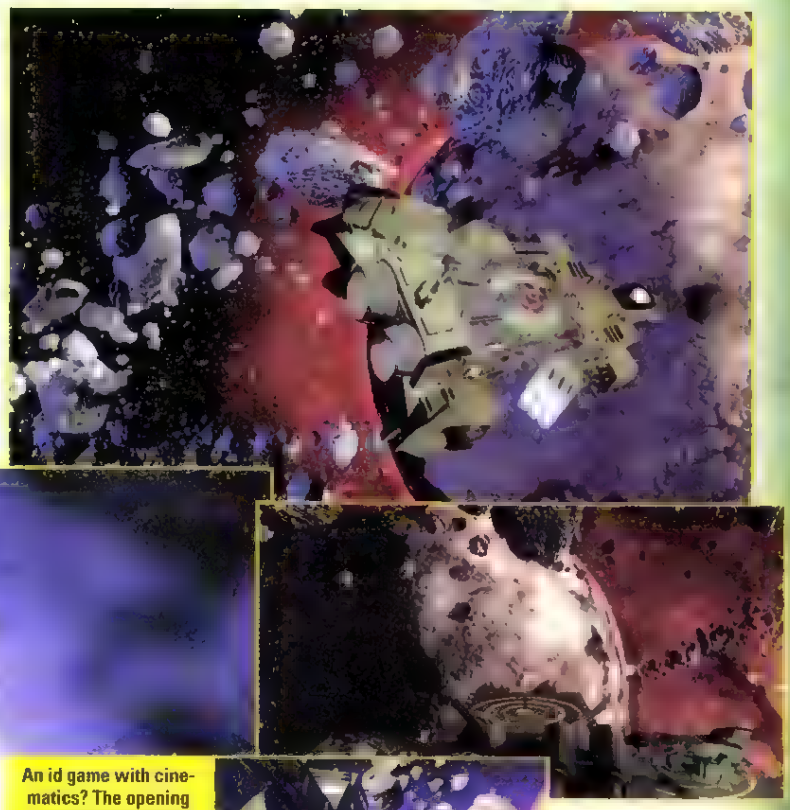
Product Information Number 316

Just ask anyone in the gaming industry — *Quake* is a *big* deal. One year ago, id Software's third major entry into the 3D action field revolutionized the genre once again, and a million copies sold later, it's still going strong. Why hasn't the mania died down, while competing games like *Duke Nukem 3D* seem to have lost their luster by comparison? Part of *Quake*'s popularity is its addictive multi-player gaming and its customizability — when id designed *Quake*, the door was purposely left open for the end user to play with the guts of the engine. The fruitful results of such open-endedness are exciting new ways to play, like Capture the Flag, Team Fortress, Killer Quake Pack, and even the racing sim Quake Rally. This has kept the online community coming back for more and more *Quake*, while all the time wondering what incredible add-ons will be popping up next.

id hasn't been neglecting its baby, either — in fact, the team has been releasing several add-ons to ensure its continuing appeal. Internet play was taken to the next level with the tightly integrated QuakeWorld system, boasting an incredible 32 players simultaneously, and *Quake*'s already stellar graphics were enhanced with the jaw-dropping GLQuake patch. Needless to say, in the unlikely event that id mysteriously disappears from the face of the earth, you can bet your bacon that *Quake* would still live on for years to come.

But id's nowhere near finished yet. *Wolfenstein* had *Spear of Destiny*, and *Doom* had *Doom II* — games which concentrated on level design and tightened the gameplay to near-perfection. *Quake II*, on the other hand, is more than a mere bunch of new levels and a few engine tweaks. It's much, much, more.



An id game with cinematics? The opening sequence for *Quake II* kicks off with loads of swish animation that shows the player's fateful drop from an orbiting troop ship into an alien-infested world.

THE VISION

So, what's new with the boys who constantly force the rest of the development community to play catch-up? id Software has gone through something of a rebirth in recent times, with the result that spirits are high, enthusiasm is stellar — even more so than when they were working on *Doom* — and everyone is hard at work. Though the staff admits that much of *Quake*'s disjointed development was essentially a competition as to who could make the coolest DeathMatch level, the id team is now working much more closely together to ensure that *Quake II* will be a team effort.

Designer and Project Leader Kevin Cloud outlines the pre-planning differences. "*Quake* was gone into with the attitude of 'Okay, here's an engine, now let's make a game!' But nobody ever said 'What game are we going to make?' You can tell — the very first textures done for the *Quake* engine were Aztec textures. Those never appeared in the game. Then medieval textures were created, and we were kinda like 'Well, maybe Raven does medieval better than we do.' Then we were doing metal textures, then base textures. In the *Quake* project, nobody had *any* clue where the game was going! So, at the very end, we had 30 levels that had *nothing* to do with each other, so we wrote a story that brought them all together. We know how we screwed up before, and we're not going to let it happen again."

This is where it all begins. You've crash-landed in the middle of an alien base, and you're definitely not going out the way you came in.

THE STORY (!)

The first earth-shattering aspect that separates *Quake II* from *Quake* is that *Quake II* actually has a plot. No, really! Though it's not going to win any awards, a "Guns of Navarone"-ish story has been devised to accompany the continuing, single-player game. You're a hardened space marine (sound

familiar?) going up against a planet-load of aliens, who fight back by taking humans and combining their body parts with extraterrestrial machinery. The Earth troopers' goal is to wipe out the planet, but matters are complicated by the aliens' extremely large planetary defense cannon. Your mission is to sock it to the aliens by strategically taking out The Big Gun, and then methodically eliminating their bases, weapons, and factories.

Though there's no melee weapon, players will always have this handy laser pistol.

The inclusion of a storyline means that *Quake II* will have continuity between levels. "The real big difference from *Quake II* over *Quake I* is how we build the maps," says Level Designer American McGee. "Instead of having single levels that have no relation to anything else, we've created units, which are groups of multiple levels. What you do in one can affect something in another. We've each been assigned different areas of the world, and plan it with identifiable areas that make sense."

Adding to the player's involvement is a series of cutscenes, integrated into the game engine, that will pop in from time to time, heightening the experience and expanding the depth of the story. Inspiration for these in-game cinematics came from the Ranger Clan, a group of online *Quake* players who enjoy creating short films with the versatile *Quake* engine — complete with voice acting and multiple camera angles.

Programming guru John Carmack doesn't have a problem with this. "Normally, I've been against cinematics for my entire career," he says, "but the reason I agreed to this one is because the same models that we use in the cinematics are used in the environment maps for the worlds. It ties it together and shows that the world is there, as you go from level to level."

The uzi's rapid fire makes it a great close-quarters weapon.

"We've added into the game a sense that you're actually not by yourself," adds Lead Designer Tim Willits. "There are marines running around, and monsters doing things, just to give the player the sense that they're not alone. There's an overall purpose in the larger scheme of things."

Naturally, all of this doesn't mean that the plot will overshadow any of the action. "Historically, all of our levels have been random," quips Carmack. "They've been fun places to run around and kill stuff — and they still will be — but there will be an undercurrent of things hanging together, having some meaning, and we think we're able to do that in a way without detracting from the fun, core environment stuff that we do. It should add a level of polish to everything."

THE WORLD

With new engine fixes and optimizations in place, the level designers at id are able to make their levels bigger and more interactive than ever. Levels in the original *Quake* used around 1000-1500 pieces ("brushes"), but now the maximum is around 4000. Refinements to the VIS code (which calculates what parts of the map are being shown) have enabled the engine to draw much further into the distance without slowing down. And when you combine that with some of the new tricks mappers have learned, expect some convincing outdoor environments and sprawling arenas. At this point, id's best guess is that *Quake II* will include approximately 30 maps, with several DeathMatch-specific levels thrown in for good measure.

There are plenty of new ways to interact with the map, too. Throwing switches and pressing buttons don't just open doors any more, but can result in new effects like drawbridges folding down from above and lava draining out of pipes. But the slickest addition is true

When was the last time you saw anything this dramatic in any other 3D shooter? Lava casts an eerie red glow in this room.

THE NEW WEAPONS

With nastier foes to do battle with, the standard arsenal has been greatly upgraded. All the original *Quake* weapons were scrapped, and replaced with deadlier — and infinitely cooler-looking — tools of destruction. The version of *Quake II* we played had four of these weapons in use, and Adrian Carmack showed us the rest in their unimplemented forms.

The most notable difference in the firepower is the enhanced feeling of having a real weapon in front of you. As each level starts, you see your arm swing up and pull out whatever weapon you may have. The weapons are located more to the right of the screen (as in *Duke3D*), and depending on what it is, it will give off colored lighting effects as it passes through the room. Not only that, but you'll actually see your fingers impatiently flicking against the gun barrel.

LASER PISTOL Your standard issue. It charges up slowly and doesn't do much damage, but boy, does it give off some gorgeous colored lighting effects. This can drop a standard grunt in one or two shots, but use it only as a last resort.

UZI With a quick rate of fire, this quick-and-dirty sub-machine gun will always get the job done. As you continue to yank the trigger, your view slowly jiggles upward, as first displayed in *Redneck Rampage.*

SHOTGUN Now this is more like it! Not only does this combat weapon dish out medium damage, but it has a more solid look than *Quake*'s wussie pea-shooter. Your hand cocks it after each shot, rotating the middle chamber and ejecting the shell inside.

CHAIN GUN Having more in common with the original chain gun from *Wolfenstein*, this shiny, metallic beauty can crank out a dozen rounds before you realize you've pulled the trigger.

RAIL GUN This one rocks. Yank on the trigger, and you get not only a massively powerful discharge, but also a swirl of colorful particles in its wake. This weapon can take down all but the most powerful enemies — and will slam through multiple enemies until it hits a wall.

DISINTEGRATOR This little toy takes enemies and dissolves them into piles of black powder. One interesting facet: instead of casting light when fired, it creates a cloud of inky darkness.

HAND GRENADE Much neater to look at than the old-fashioned grenade launcher, you can actually see your hands pop it open and give it a fling.

MISSLIE LAUNCHER The weapon of choice for just about every *Quake* player, this destructive projectile-based weapon will be making its return in a much deadlier form.

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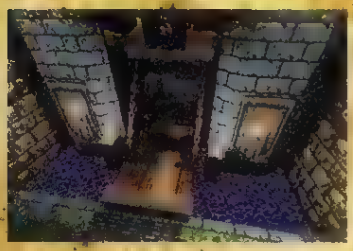
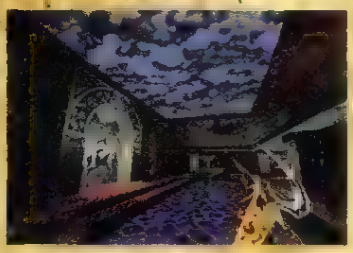


Possess distinct spells, powers and weapons. With experience, gain levels, more hit points and certain abilities that apply to your specific character class, such as increased-speed, fire power and jump distance.



Lose yourself in lightning storms, blowing leaves, earthquakes, spraying fountains and pouring rain.

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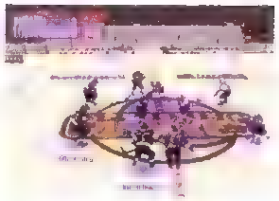

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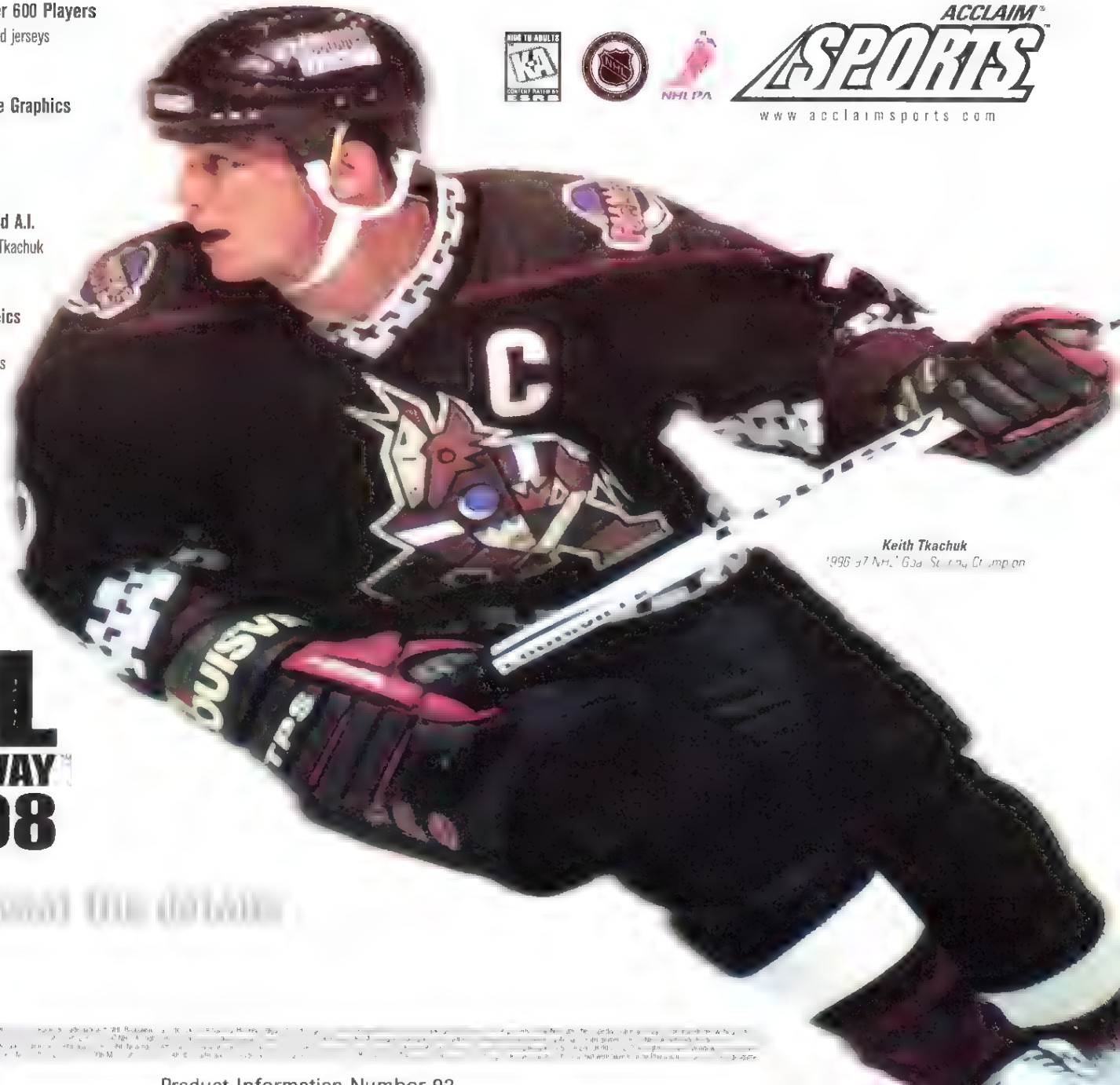

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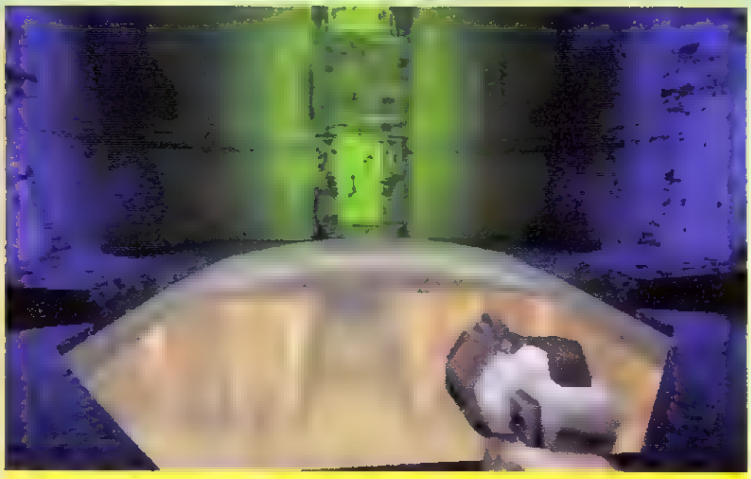


Here are just two of *Quake II*'s new level effects — mixed colored lighting and multi-layered transparencies.

object rotation. Doors swing open, floors slant and drop away, and, in a dramatic demonstration of a revamped version of the Abandoned Base level from *Quake*, the entire floor rotates, dropping you into a pit of lava if you're not careful. This allows for some entertaining tricks and traps — enemies can be blasted into giant metal grinders, which will turn them into pudding.

Another major enhancement is the element of crouching — it's now possible for you (or even a monster) to duck under a missile in the heat of a DeathMatch, or you can even slink into the shadows and avoid detection from others. Crouching can also get you into some areas that might not have been accessible beforehand (just like that nutty *Duke Nukem* game).

So what's all this hard-core technology going to take to run? According to id, *Quake II*'s base machine will be a 90Mhz Pentium with 16 Megabytes of RAM. The massive maps and engine tweaks have increased the system requirements, which shouldn't come as a shock to anybody, especially *Quake II* will require Windows 95. Due to the reliance on the DLL files, there *won't* be a native DOS version

One of the early test maps demonstrated some of the sick fun you can have by baiting monsters. I walked into a room, alerted some grunts, then turned tail and ran into a room with a fully-functional, rotating gun turret. The first of the monsters was gibbed as I swung the turret around, and the rest became street pizza under a deluge of missiles. The opposing forces have some tricks up their sleeves, too — body-slicing laser beams may give you a headache until you realize that objects can actually be pushed around. In one instance, you'll be required to shove a radioactive barrel into the line of fire of a laser beam, allowing you to slip through the perimeter before the barrel explodes.

Wearing a twisted grin, McGee demonstrated one of his alien monster factories, which includes a unique machine that's sure to elicit a few laughs. "Just watch," he says, as a human is dropped onto a platform behind a layer of transparent Plexiglas. Suddenly, a massive block drops from the ceiling, squashing the innocent victim. Blood splatters on the glass, and only tiny human bits remain. But that's not all — the floor unfolds, and the giblets drop into a tub of human remains. The cycle repeats. Nice.

MUSIC TO FRAG TO

Quake II's audio portion is still pretty early in development, but what we've heard is already sounding great — most of the sound effects are being created in-house by jack-of-all-trades American McGee. The audio quality promises to eclipse even Trent Reznor's pioneering work on the first *Quake*, and the way that sound works in the 3D world makes it even more convincing. It's now possible to have moving audio fields — in one sequence, you have to sprint out of a tunnel as a wall of fire rushes towards you, getting louder as it approaches.

The original *Quake* contained some unique background "music" by Nine Inch Nails. While it was effective in bringing the first-time player into the action, most of us ditched the original CD and popped in something more appropriate, like Primus, Marilyn Manson, or John Tesh. Our old buddy Trent Reznor won't be making a repeat performance, so the 15 music tracks in *Quake II* will be performed by Sonic Mayhem, the group responsible for the *Quake: Methods of Destruction* CD. And those music tracks *will* be real music — not just high-level distortion and metallic clangs. Sounds pretty cool...

"The next generation is plotted out for me in terms of what I want to attempt to accomplish, and I have vague notions about what's going to be happening in the generation after that, into the next century. There are a lot of exciting things coming."

JOHN CARMACK

YOU'LL NEVER PLAY ALONE

Remember the original vision of *Quake* games with several hundred players at once — and how it was such a bummer when 16 players was the eventual limit? The online QuakeWorld caused quite a stir when the number of players was doubled to 32, but *Quake II*'s built-in version of QuakeWorld will smash that barrier — do you think you're ready for *two-hundred-player* DeathMatches? The *Quake II* engine can be scaled to play such an enormous game — but not without some major server-side computing horsepower. Presently, it takes a dedicated T1 line to keep a 80-player game of *Quake* moving smoothly for all participants, but technology that can power hundreds of players is just around the corner. And with the increased size limits of level design, DeathMatch maps can finally be roomy enough to

After taking down this Gunner, you'll finally have access to the level exit.

accommodate this massively multi-player experience — and id may be pasting together three or four of the typical single-player maps to encourage this. Steps have been taken to ensure that you and other players won't feel as anonymous — aim your weapon at a foe, and their name will appear above their head, along with a tiny picture of the weapon they're holding

A few other multi-player goodies have managed to squeeze their way in. At this year's QuakeCon, arrangements were made for the incorporation of Capture the Flag into the *Quake II* package. This marks the first end-user patch that has been tied into the commercial product, and it certainly deserves it — CTF breathes new life into the game if you ever get tired of DeathMatching. Beside the huge emphasis on the single-player mode, there's also the addition to play cooperatively, where you and a friend can take on the monsters at once

A few server-side aspects have been toned down in order to keep the engine adaptable. "One of the big issues right now is that *Quake II* does not use player prediction like in QuakeWorld, for flexibility reasons," says Carmack, "and we probably will release an Internet-optimized version at a later date. Player prediction cuts down on the flexibility. You don't see most of the modifications out there working with QuakeWorld, because the model I used to get better Internet response cuts down immensely on flexibility. We'll probably get the client-side prediction in a later add-on release like a QuakeWorld II. That's one of those rough decisions where I'm going to get flak no matter which way I go."

Of course, QuakeWorld won't be the only place where you can play *Quake II* — deals are still pending with HEAT, TEN, and Mplayer, so gamers with a preference for a more user-friendly interface will have something to look forward to.

Getting up this staircase won't be easy, with snipers attempting to pick you off every step of the way

MONSTERS, BLASTERS, AND GIBS, OH MY!

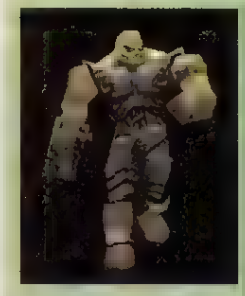
Every bad guy, weapon, and texture map you see in any id game comes from the darkly-lit art department, a windowless cave in the core of the id offices. Here, Adrian Carmack takes a seat and pulls up a model texturing program on one PC, and an ancient copy of *DeluxePaint* on the other. He explains that the new texturing program was recently written by John Carmack, and facilitates painting the skins on enemies tenfold. Previously, Adrian had to run *Quake* every time he wanted to see how a monster would actually look. *Quake II*'s cast of monsters has more of a relationship to the story — most of them are different chunks of human body parts, melded together with robotic technology to create horrific, man-machine creations that make the Borg look positively homely

Adrian Carmack tries to make any distortion of textures work *for* him. "Almost all the characters have segmented armor on their legs, so when it stretches you get the impression of plates meshing back and forth," he says. In fact, a lot of what you see in *Quake II* will be Adrian's texture tricks, which fool the eye into thinking that a flat texture has actual depth.

Adrian also takes great pride in his "Pain Skins" — textures that are placed on monsters once they've been damaged. He pulls up the standard textured monster model and spins it around on screen. He closes the window, loads the Pain Skin, and a much bloodier

THE ROGUE'S GALLERY

Aside from new weapons, Quake II will come with a whole new army of baddies to battle. This is not all of them, of course — id is still working on a frightening menagerie of new monsters. We got to see the models for a monster-healing beast that paid homage to Doom II's ArchVile, a Descent-style floating spaceship piloted by a decapitated head, a bouncy gun-toting call-girl called the CrackWhore, and a trooper with a massive jet propulsion unit strapped to his back — and there are even more on the way. Here's just a few monsters you'll definitely see...



The buffed up infantryman packs quite a punch with that chaingun welded onto his arm. If you get too close, he'll come out swinging with a mother lode of whoop-ass.

From afar, this fellow's bark is worse than his bite — but get up-close and personal, and the Beserker will strike at you with his mechanical arm.

This strange looking creation can hover high above the ground and alert other monsters to your presence. Kill 'em quick to watch 'em crash and burn.

Featuring a trick arm that splits into three parts, revealing a machine gun hidden inside, the Gunner is a worthy foe for long-range battle.

This fellow, appropriately named "Tank," has multiple attack patterns — he can either pepper you with mini-gun fire, or use his shoulder-mounted missile rack to gib you to kingdom come.

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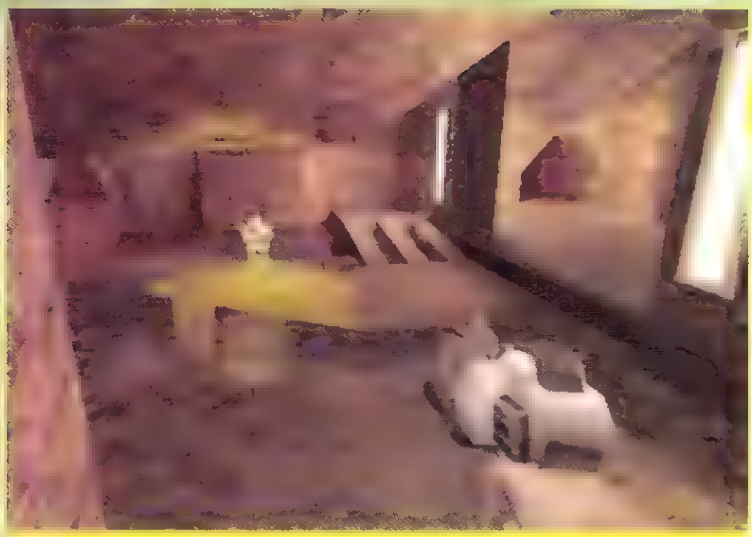

As this gunner takes a pot-shot at you, notice the yellow lighting that illuminates the surrounding area. Nice.

version of the monster appears, riddled with bullet holes. Adrian grins and rotates the model, revealing an exit wound the size of a cheesecake. "It's so much fun to do these," he laughs. "I did all these pain skins in a day, just to get 'em in for E3. Now I'm gonna go back and *really* mess 'em up bad."

Death sequences are also much more intense. The award for most dramatic death goes to the Infantryman, whose head pops right off. Battered but not out for the count, what remains of him drunkenly staggers around, spraying the room with chain gun fire, before finally collapsing to the ground. You think it's over... but then the flies start swarming around him. *Still* haven't had enough? Just shoot the corpse, which explodes into bite-sized chunks.

Making the grisly display even more effective is the refined character animation. "In *Quake*, we created the animation at ten frames per second," says Cloud. "In *Quake II*, we're also creating the animation at ten frames per second, but we're having interpolation in between each frame." This means that monsters will move just as smoothly as the rest of the game — if you're moving at 30 frames per second, the monsters will appear just as fluid. And here's an interesting feature you might not notice: hide in the shadows long enough, and the monsters will go into idle animations — the Infantryman will flex his muscles for the camera, Arnold Schwarzenegger style, and the Gunner opens up his gun and checks its status.

As if they weren't already difficult enough to kill, monsters have been gifted with some fiendish AI routines. Enemies will chase you in a more intelligent manner than in *Quake*, have more random level-roaming patterns, and can even keep up with you if you run away. If you try hiding in the shadows and accidentally make a sound, you've just given away your location.

The bad guys may be nastier than ever, but the protagonists have also been modified for the better. If you thought that the standard multi-player *Quake* guy looked pretty studly before, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Adrian hasn't textured them yet, so they exist only as basic geometry. But one thing's for sure: *they're buffed*. What's more, the figure on the right is undeniably female (with a steel breastplate covering her womanhood — settle down, Beavis). Fortunately, we won't be getting a *Quake* bimbo — instead, we're getting a butt-whuppin', armored and assertive female marine who makes *Alien*'s Ripley look like a kindergarten teacher.

"With the Quake project, nobody had any clue where the game was going! So, at the very end, we had 30 levels that had nothing to do with each other, so we wrote a story that brought them all together. We know how we screwed up before, and we're not going to let it happen again."

KEVIN CLOUD

LIGHTS, CAMERA...

Thanks to a carefully redesigned color selection, *Quake II*'s palette is greatly expanded, allowing far more varied environments, while implementing colored lighting effects that will blow you away. The entire spectrum is used, and lighting blends together as subtly and beautifully as anything we've seen so far in *Unreal* or *Prey*. Using the QRAD lighting algorithm, light of any color can bounce from wall to wall and reflect off surfaces. Water gives off an ethereal green glow, and bubbling lava bathes rooms in a red tint. The entire environment is affected, so as you pass through different hallways, the light plays on your weapon and on the creatures around you.

Though the extremely tasty transparency effects will now be available in the software-only renderer, the full spectrum of colored lighting will only be present if you have a 3Dfx card — or an OpenGL card that supports the requirements for lighting. Verite support is still up in the air, as John Carmack reports: "We cannot guarantee that it's going to be in there. It's going to be up to them, but they are the only company that we're giving the option of developing a custom rendering DLL for. Everyone else we're just saying has to do an OpenGL driver." And if you haven't upgraded to the new wave of 3D hardware yet, fear not — *Quake II* will be just as playable through the software-based rendering mode.

Though some have accused Carmack of showing favoritism towards 3Dfx, it ain't necessarily so. "I wrote *GLQuake* so I could run it on this," he says, pointing at one of the computers under his desk, "an Intergraph Realism GL Accelerator. We had it up and running, and showed it to 3Dfx. They said 'Look, we can write an OpenGL driver,' and they came back with one, and it just worked."

CUSTOMIZABILITY

"When we released *Quake*, you could do a lot of really cool stuff with this engine," says McGee. "We knew someone could make a racing game, a flying game, and even a side-scroller, and there's even stuff like Quess (*Battle Chess* meets *Quake*). We all knew this stuff was potentially possible. Some of the most humorous stuff like Severed — we *love* that! — where you shoot the guy and his arm flies off. We may even incorporate that into *Quake II* if we have the time." When questioned about their favorite user-created add-on, just about everyone from id answered Quake Rally, a patch that brings arcade-style racing into the gritty world of *Quake*.

This infantryman struts through the alien complex.

As soon as *Quake II* is released, expect authors of shareware map creation software like *Worldcraft* to start revising their code to take advantage of *Quake II*'s new features. The fact that people were actually *willing* to build levels surprises most of the staff at id. "When we released *Quake*, we thought no way are people going to be able to make their own maps, and if

CONTINUED ON PAGE 117

1. Look out the window, and you'll see the alien complex off in the distance.
2. These rotating grinders will chew up whatever you toss into them — including yourself, if you're not careful.
3. Fire off a shot in water, and you'll witness a cool tracer effect that follows bullets.
4. Hot magma got you down?
5. Just flip a switch in this room, and the lava will drain out of this tub, letting you explore further into the level.
6.
7. The enhanced *Quake II* engine features many new effects, such as the particles dropping from the doorway, and colored lighting emanating from surfaces.
8. Rotating brush technology allow for some slick effects, like this slowly rotating fan.
9. The awesome power of the rail gun sends this grunt sailing. Mmm, rail gun.
10. If you can eliminate this extraterrestrial weapon, you'll strike a major blow against the alien forces.
11. Transparent textures allow you to watch the monsters lurk outside your window.
12. Hey, look! Whoever smashed down that door might be able to help us get out of here!
13. This infantryman flexes his stuff right before we introduce him to Mr. Rail gun.

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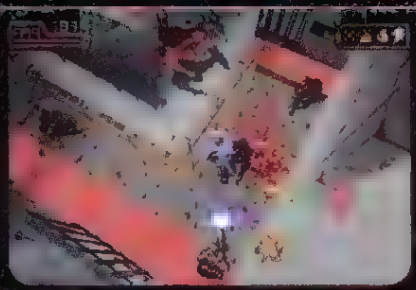

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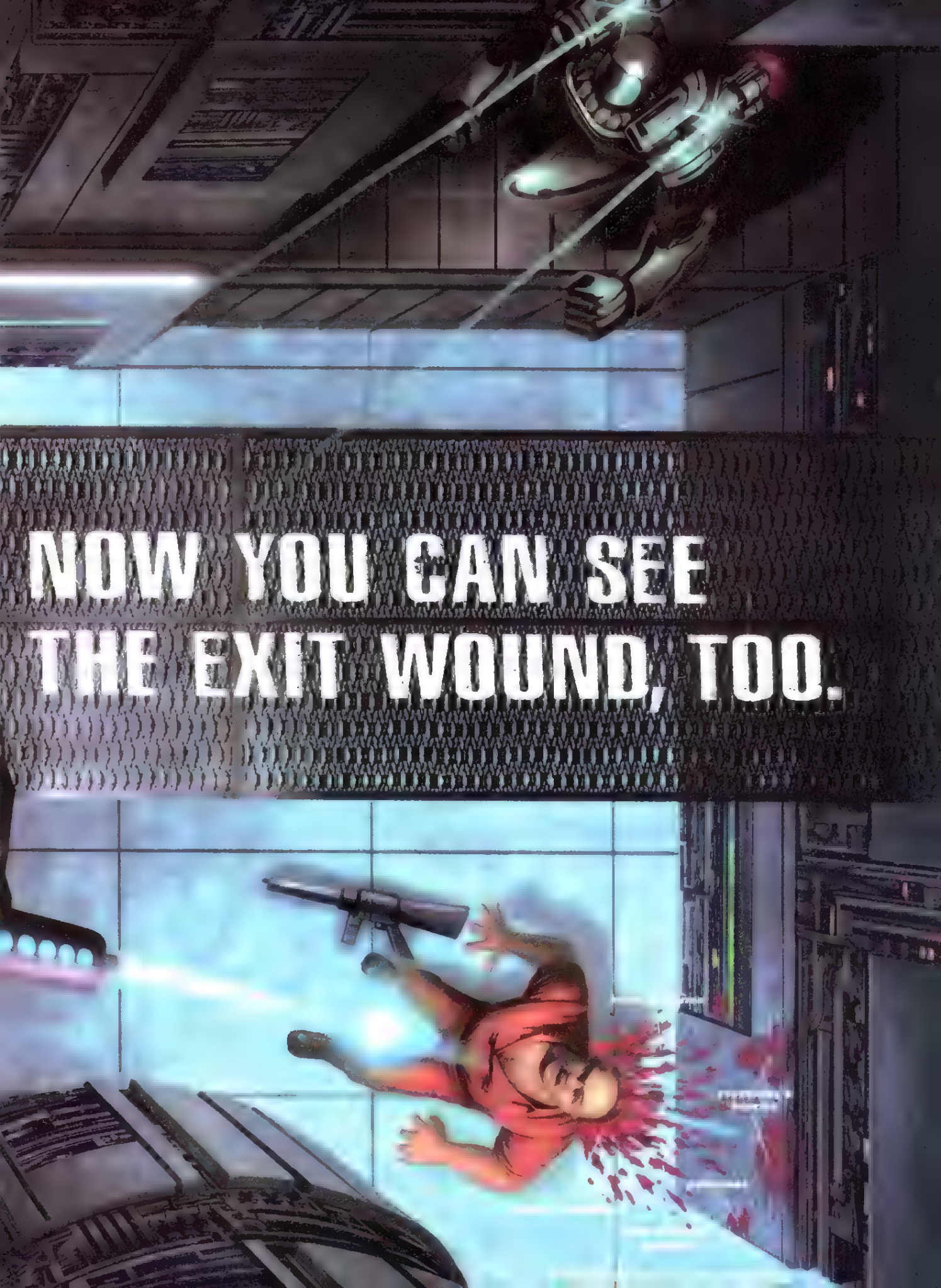
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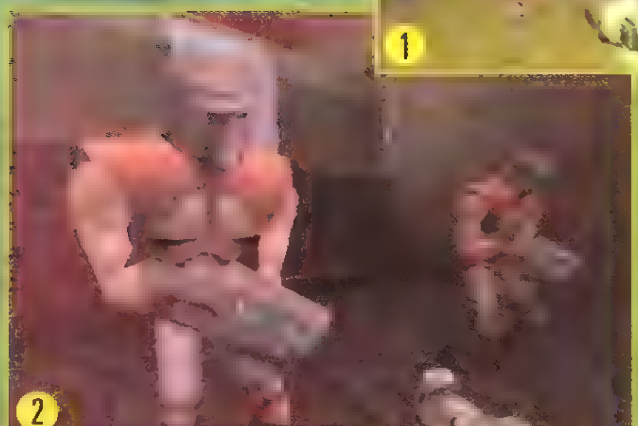

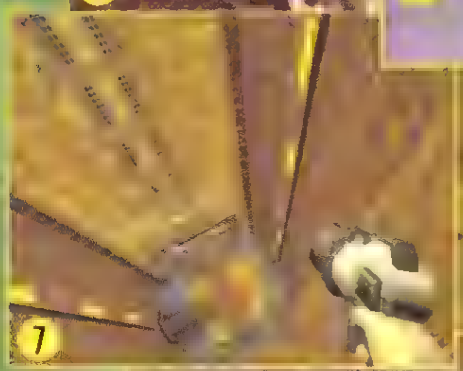

1 A berzerker opens fire at close range. Note the light-sourcing and particle effects. Cool, huh?

2 Two paycheck lovin' grunts hold their ground outside an alien complex...

3 4 5 ...then Mr. Uzi steps in with a score to settle and the boots go flyin'...

6 Going one-on-one against this bad boy in a shady hallway isn't a good idea — get some space between you and pick him off.

7 It's a long way down, baby! With an increased level size limit, look for some long passageways and deep pits.

8 Some of the nasty mongrels in *Quake II* are going to bite it in extremely nasty ways, like this infantryman. After a couple of shots, his head will pop right off...

9 With his finger still on the trigger, he'll spray the surrounding area with machine gun fire...

10 ... only to drop dead and serve as food for the flies. Neat!

11 New textures, exquisite level design, *and* aliens? Count me in sarge, I'll go first.

12 13 14 As this sequence of shots shows, the addition of colored lighting will make 3Dfx owners very, very happy. It ain't available in software.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 112

they do, they're going to be stealing processor time from their university!" says McGee, laughing. "It didn't happen that way — they're patient. They start BSPing their map on their P90, they wait four days, and then they check it out. Colored lighting just means they're going to have to wait a little longer." To give you an idea of the complexity of the new maps, some of them can take several hours to process — and that's on id's 16-processor SGI Origin 2000.

The real heart of the *Quake* editing community, however, is the *QuakeC* programming language. With the native Windows 95 support in *Quake II*, straight *QuakeC* has been scrapped and replaced with programmable Windows DLL files that offer more control than *QuakeC* ever could. "You have full control over the camera view, screen fades, pinning objects together, and a lot of things that are going to drastically improve the add-on capability," says Carmack. "The DLL programming model has a whole set of issues that I'm still fundamentally convinced is the right thing. The extreme amount of control is going to make some really interesting things happen." Judging by the huge amounts of creativity exercised by *Quake* hackers (*Busta Rhymes Quake*, anyone?), we can't wait to see what *Quake II* magic will emerge from the online community.

THE WRAP-UP

Can't wait to play *Quake II*? Neither can we — and even though id has reported that *Quake II* will be released "When it's done," you'd better believe that they're shooting for a Christmas launch. Until then, you might want to pick up an OpenGL graphics board, clear up some hard drive space, keep your finger on the shotgun trigger, and get ready to keep those frags coming...

Brother, that's action! You'll revel in *Quake II*'s gory and gruesome pain skins, as this ex-alien eats a load of shotgun fire.

THE ROMERO FACTOR

Obviously, a big question surrounding the development of *Quake II* is: What impact does the departure of id's lead game designer John Romero have? Well, the answer depends on who you listen to. While researching this question for our feature, *PC Gamer* inadvertently triggered a war of words between id Software and Romero, now at his own startup game company, ION Storm.

Several senior members of id claim that the real circumstances surrounding Romero's departure shortly after the completion of *Quake* are very different from the official version fed to the press — they say Romero was ousted from id, and good riddance. "Romero was fired for incompetence," says veteran id member American McGee. "He got rich, he got successful, he got lazy. He would come into work at around noon, he'd go eat lunch, and he'd leave at four or five. And he'd usually play DeathMatch the entire time. That was useless. So here we are, supposed to be creating a product that this company is supposed to be selling lots of, and one of the main owners, who's getting paid a million dollars a year, is sitting on his ass. And he's supposed to be our inspiration? He'd been given control over this project, and he basically led us into the ground. He refused to accept that others might have intelligent ideas. If you went to him with an idea, he would either shoot it down, and tell you to go away, or he would shoot it down, and tell others that he had just thought of it. He was really good at that.

ROMERO

"So, at the end of the whole thing, he did get fired, was literally handed his resignation papers. And that's not an easy thing for this company to do, because they have to pay Romero to leave. And that's a lot of money. And we said, you know what? We're not going to sabotage your future career. We're going to say that you left to start your own company because you had design differences with us."

Romero himself, however, tells a very different version of events.

"American McGee is living in an alternate reality judging by the complete falsehood of the majority of his comments," he responded. "True, some days I came back from lunch after 1p.m., many days I DeathMatched, some days I left at 5p.m. But lumping them all together as if I did all those activities in one day is ludicrous.

"The last six months of *Quake* development were the hardest months I've ever worked in my life," Romero continues. "A minimum of 12 hours a day, seven days a week. I was in charge of designing a game that ran through a committee process to decide what went in and what went out. That is not a visionary design process, it's a 'most common denominator' design process that results in a minimalist game design so id can show off their shiny new 3D engine. As a hardcore game player, I was very disappointed that we weren't moving forward as a company in a design-oriented direction. So after many years of designing some really fun, great games at id, they think I led them into the ground with *Quake*? Hardly."

So who's right and who's wrong? It's impossible to tell, but one thing's for sure — the answer will have a definite bearing on the final quality of *Quake II* and Romero's rival 3D shooter *Daikatana*, due to hit the streets at the same time. And in the end, it's the games that will tell the tale....

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an interview with...

JOHN CARMACK

PRESIDENT/TECHNICAL DIRECTOR OF ID

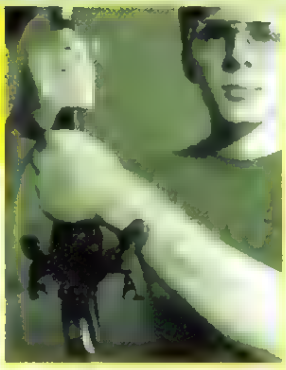
Few people have had as much effect on this industry as John Carmack. As the programming god behind *Wolfenstein*, *Doom*, and *Quake*, he's frequently recognized when he ventures out in public, and is occasionally hounded by autograph-seeking fans. Though usually reluctant to grant interviews because they cut into the time that he could be spending working on the Next Big Thing, John was kind enough to sit down and talk with *PC Gamer* about id, *Quake II*, and where PC gaming is headed.

By using a 3D viewer created by John, the other Carmack — Adrian — can now texture with less hassle.

PC GAMER: *Quake just celebrated its first birthday. Looking back at it, are you surprised at its success?*
CARMACK: We knew that when we got *Quake* out that it wasn't all that we really wanted it to be. We had a lot of internal problems as the game was developed, and there were a lot of issues in development. Overall, I'm going to say that I am very pleased at how it's turned out, and while we didn't hit everything on the head, game-wise, as a phenomenon, as a technology platform, and as a focus for a community, I think it's done really well.

PC GAMER: *Did you ever see yourself in the position that you're in now?*
CARMACK: My basic attitude about work hasn't changed at all. I still come in every day and work hard, and do the best that I can to find the right trade-offs on the issues. The rewards for me are mostly internally generated. It's nice to have Ferraris and millions of dollars, but it's not the motivator. I'm in this because I love programming, which is my calling in life. My attitude about development hasn't changed a bit. If anything, I'm a lot more focused as a person, since the discipline of working through these projects has increased my ability to stay on task and get things done.

PC GAMER: *With the company going through a transformation, do you see yourself taking any more of a leadership role?*
CARMACK: Not really. It would be very easy to go into a position of being a company leader. But programming takes all of my time, and any time I spend talking to reporters or doing other things is time that is taken away from accomplishing something with the programming. I want to disinvolve myself with it as much as possible. It's working out really well where Kevin [Cloud] manages the project, and though it cuts into the time that he can spend on the artwork, it's the most efficient use of the company's resources.



"I don't foresee myself retiring until I basically break myself. There's no financial incentive — I'm not being driven to purchase small islands or anything. If anything, I'm more interested in my work now than ever before. I don't foresee myself going away any time soon."

JOHN CARMACK

Most maps in *Quake II* contain more than 4000 brushes, four times that of *Quake*.

PC GAMER: *When you created QuakeC and built the game around it, did you have any idea it would be so popular?*
CARMACK: That was specifically engineered for the add-on community. Up to *Wolfenstein* we were just doing games. When people started hacking *Wolfenstein*, we were like, wow, this is pretty cool, we want to encourage this! With *Doom*, there were significant steps with how modifiable the world structure was going to be. Obviously, that was quite a phenomenon with the level editing and all that, so during the design of *Quake* a lot of the decisions were based on creating something that was going to be flexible enough for lots of people to play with. There's two levels of that — the user community, who are people doing cool stuff, and the generality of an engine that can be licensable. To be honest, I have more fun catering to the user community than to other companies, because we get to see more wildly creative things, like Quess and Quake Rally. With the combination of the DLL code, the increased scaleability on the servers, and the increase on map limits, people are going to make some interesting persistent worlds

The scale of the maps, along with the complexity, has increased exponentially in *Quake II*.

PC GAMER: *Do you think that user level design is a good starting point when it comes to getting into the gaming industry?*
CARMACK: There's a horrible feeding frenzy in the *Quake* community. All the prominent people in the user committee are being snapped up by professional companies. I suspect that it's going to be a good spawning ground for a long time. There is the scent of money in the community — it started out that everybody was doing it because wow, this is cool, but now everyone is hearing that so-and-so got a job and is making $50,000 a year

PC GAMER: *Will the 3D API standard be OpenGL, as you hoped?*
CARMACK: D3D is not going to go away. I do think that six months ago, in the January timeframe, there was a window of opportunity, and Microsoft isn't above doing the about-face on something. I believe that there was at least consideration of changing

direction, but their course has pretty much hardened. It's a fairly antagonistic stance — they do give lip-service to still supporting OpenGL, since that's what they steal workstation sales with, but they really wish it didn't exist on Windows 95 at all. One of the important issues for us is the portability — *Quake II* is going to be present on LINUX, Rhapsody, Irix, and probably AIX. Any place that has hardware-accelerated OpenGL we'll probably port our game to. If we supported D3D, it would still be possible, but then it's a matter of taking out all that code and rewriting. Now it's just a matter of coding portably, with proper standards. We can literally bring it up on UNIX or LINUX in a couple days. And it's cool to have this stuff running on an SGI Infinite Reality or something, just for sheer geek thrill potential (*laughs*). That's exactly what Microsoft does not want, because if you program D3D, you are just plain locked in.

This explosive sequence shows off how the physics model has been applied to the monsters, as a grunt gets launched into the lava below.

PC GAMER: ***What aspects of Quake II will impress the casual gamer, rather than the hard-core Quake fan?***

CARMACK: There are a lot of subtle cues that will be going on. In general, the GL experience, with colored lighting and environment mapping outdoors, interpolated models… there's a good deal of technical wow there, but that's not the focus of the game — although when I start doing the next generation engine, it really will be more back to "here's the raw technology." This is a follow-on, evolutionary game, and we're trying to put everything in its most appropriate place.

PC GAMER: ***Why is the Quake engine getting licensed out more than the Doom engine was?***

CARMACK: With the *Doom* engine, so much of the architecture was tricks. People would play *Doom* and think they can do anything they want with it. We get calls from architectural houses — but they didn't understand how limited this really is. A lot of people that would seek us out for licenses thought we had a lack of artistic vision because our maps didn't look like grand cathedrals, but that was just the limits of the technology. With *Quake*, it's flexible enough to do just about anything people can envision. This was the first technology where I felt comfortable that people would be able to do what they wanted to do with it. Buying technology is the most appropriate thing for most companies, because the idea of coughing up half a million dollars or speculating that something will take a year longer to complete is a no-brainer.

PC GAMER: ***What's your opinion on the 3D accelerators on the market?***

CARMACK: Right now, it's so stratified it's just horrible. You've got 3Dfx and you've got everything else. We were thinking about 3D acceleration from the very beginning of *Quake*, since we knew all this stuff was coming, and we were set up to allow a hardware rasterized version. Concerning 3Dfx, it's rare to see a factor of four performance difference like that. It's almost unheard of. The 3Dfx Voodoo has the performance and capabilities where you begin to think differently about your programming architecture, where you can do interesting new things and the hardware is *helping* you. With the other cards, you have to cater to the hardware rather than *it* making *your* life easier. There's going to be a little cottage industry for a while of people catering to 3Dfx titles because they are just plain easier to write.

Watch your step — you don't want to be ground up by the spinning fan at the bottom of the screen.

PC GAMER: ***Why will Quake II be the last id game that supports software rendering?***

CARMACK: There are so many big advantages when we design for hardware. We can get more performance that way, and a lot more freedom in how the geometry can move. We can morph it, interpolate it, do interesting things that weren't possible with the software renderers. It's a bigger change than going to a processor that has double the speed, which is what we've been doing in each generation so far.

PC GAMER: ***How much longer do you see yourself programming bleeding-edge engines?***

CARMACK: Each generation has been harder to push out the door. It's more work. I'm hoping that I get better with each generation, that I can work more efficiently inside the given timeline. It's definitely getting harder. I rupture a brain vessel sometimes (*laughs*). I think the next one's going to go okay. The team here is good. I'm looking forward to our next from-scratch product. I don't foresee myself retiring until I basically break myself. There's no financial incentive — I'm not being driven to purchase small islands or anything. I wake up every morning eager to get into work. If anything, I'm more interested in my work now than ever before. I don't foresee myself going away any time soon.

As the interview winds up, one thing is obvious — Carmack's newfound fame hasn't changed him a bit, and he seems more like your typical coder than a boisterous prima donna. Programming isn't his only specialty, either — as I leave his office, the conversation drifts from computer games to cars.

"My cars are my only real vice," says Carmack, as I examine a curious hunk of metal that serves as a paperweight. It turns out to be a cracked engine piston. "That's out of my Testarossa," he explains. I pick up another small, nondescript metal bar — a busted drive shaft. "I broke four of these. It's up around 1200 HP now, and it breaks things. It's more of a science project than a car. Twin turbos, nitrous, ported, heads, the whole nine yards." Considering that gamers everywhere are waiting for his next 3D masterpiece, we can only say one thing: *please* drive carefully, John.

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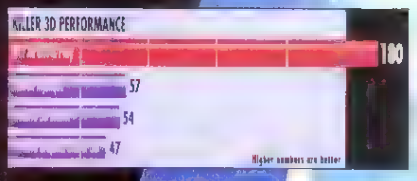

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Now You See It.

Product Information Number 90

an interview with...

TODD HOLLENSHEAD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF ID

After the departure of Jay Wilbur to Epic Megagames, Todd Hollenshead picked up the coveted mantle of the id Software 'Biz Guy.' Taking charge of the PC's most successful game developer hasn't gone to his head, either — Hollenshead is as down-to-earth as you can get, and with his DeathMatching skills improving daily, he fits right in with the rest of the boys.

PC GAMER: *When did you get started at id?*
HOLLENSHEAD: The end of October last year. Id had been a client of mine, and over the past year I had gotten to meet Jay [Wilbur] and Mike Wilson, [John] Romero, and all the other owners at the time. When Jay announced his resignation, Adrian [Carmack] gave me a call and asked me to help him in the search, and a few days later asked me if I'd be interested in putting my resume in. I thought about it for a while, took them on, and they eventually offered me the job.

PC GAMER: *So, how's* Quake II *looking to you?*
HOLLENSHEAD: I'm pretty excited about it! It looks really good. I'm a big fan of *Quake*, actually — I know a lot of people think that the biz guys don't really play the games, but I get in my fair share of DeathMatch (*laughs*). It's easy to tell the improvements we've made in the game, and there's been a huge emphasis on making the game better for all aspects of play, with a particular focus on the single-player stuff. We're going to bring all of the things that were great about *Quake* and all the things that people really liked about *Doom* and throw in some new elements to make a game that's new, fresh, and innovative, and give people what *they* want to play.

> *"We're going to bring all of the things that were great about* Quake *and all the things that people really liked about* Doom *and throw in some new elements to make a game that's new, fresh, and innovative, and give people what* they *want to play."*
>
> TODD HOLLENSHEAD

PC GAMER: *Since Activision is distributing* Quake II, *what's GT Interactive's current role with id?*
HOLLENSHEAD: The older games like the *Doom* series, all the way back to *Wolfenstein*, are all distributed through GT, plus the console products like the *Hexen* ports and the Saturn and N64 conversions of *Quake*. Plus the *id anthology* — as these products go through their life cycles, GT will do different things with them. We are still working with them on a day-to-day basis, and because of the way we position the company — such that every project is basically done on a deal-to-deal basis — there's nothing to say that we won't go back to GT. At this point in time, the relationship we've had with Activision has been very good, and we're really excited to be going into Christmas with two products, plus the two mission packs for *Quake*.

PC GAMER: *Could licensing out the* Quake *engine to so many different companies hurt you from a financial standpoint?*
HOLLENSHEAD: We could keep the technology to ourselves, and only id and Raven games would have Quake technology, because that's how we did it with the Doom engine. There certainly is some diffusion of the market by having other products that have competitive technology, because at this point, in all fairness, I don't think there's anybody who shipped with a competitive technology, though there's speculation that some games this Christmas will have something that's in the same ballpark. Certainly there's a competitive edge we get from the rendering speed of the engine, and John's done work in the multi-player aspect that no one has touched. The idea behind licensing is that we're not going to be able to be all things to all people. Instead of having 120 people develop technology, and have multiple teams work with that technology to do different iterations and different styles of games, the best use of the technology — which has a limited shelf life to begin with — is to license it to other developers so they can expand upon our vision of what the 3D market should be like.

Here's one of the machines in the human processing factory — complete with moving conveyor belt and giblet-squishing crusher.

PC GAMER: *What's the reason you're not doing a shareware version of* Quake II*?*
HOLLENSHEAD: The business model we operate under is to do one shareware product and follow it up with a retail sequel. We'll have a demo version, but it won't be as robust or deep as the original *Quake* shareware. From a marketing standpoint, we think that since *Quake* made a name in the market, we're better off to go with the full version right into retail.

PC GAMER: *How long will it be until we start seeing id games written only for 3D hardware?*
HOLLENSHEAD: Right now, computers are starting to ship with accelerators. Almost anything you buy now has an S3 ViRGE or something like that. The computer manufacturers have crossed the philosophical

The high-powered railgun leaves a spiraling stream of particles in its wake — and nails the hell out of anything in its path.

This picture can give you a good idea of how the *Quake* engine has evolved in terms of large, outdoor arenas.

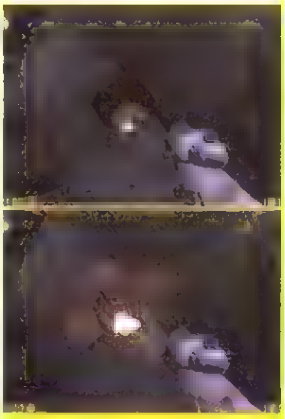
threshold that this stuff needs to be bundled with the hardware. The problem is that they're a generation behind in terms of putting the right equipment on the board. 3Dfx and a lot of the hardware manufacturers are still startup companies, from a business standpoint. And when you have guys like Compaq and Packard Bell, there's a reluctance to go whole hog and put a lot of investment in buying up the manufacturing outlet for a period of time. 3D card manufacturers need to get some momentum going to get the mainstream computer manufacturers to start buying those boards with the machines. It's probably a year before the hardware-only market is viable enough to do a GL card only game and still have enough customers out there with the hardware to run it.

PC GAMER: *What percentage of* Quake *players are the hard-core gamers — the 'net players, map designers, and* Quake *coders?*

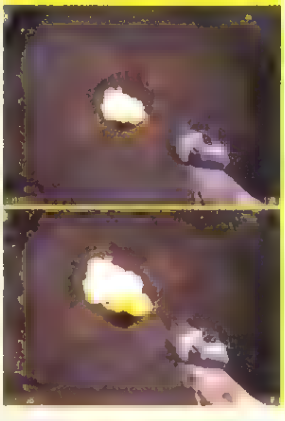
HOLLENSHEAD: I think you're talking a real small percentage, maybe five percent. But because of the open-ended nature of the architecture, it made that five percent triple in size. It's good to see that the community is growing and all — I'm not a level editor myself, but from what I understand from some of these other guys, I may not be able to do a very good job at it, but I could probably sit down and start developing stuff within a few hours.

PC GAMER: *Do you enforce what things people are allowed to create for* Quake, *and is there a line that can be crossed where you have to step in and say "No, you can't do that"?*

HOLLENSHEAD: There's a constant struggle between making the game as open-ended and as free as possible for everyone to do whatever they want to do with it, and still maintain a proprietary interest in your copyrights. Where we have drawn our line is that if people want to do stuff for non-commercial purposes, they can do whatever they want to. If they want to do something on a commercial basis, and they use copyrighted images, they need to come to us for a license. We try to encourage these guys to do so. Unfortunately, there are some bottom-feeders in the industry — I'm sure you guys are familiar with them — that really don't have any concept of quality, and they know that because of the millions of dollars spent in marketing *Quake*, all they need to do is somehow affiliate their product with ours, and they're going to get some level of PC sales. And they can do it with no overhead, since they can pull levels off the internet, download them onto a CD — and if they sell 20,000 units of this stuff, then it's just free money to them. That's what we'd like to prevent, but some of these guys are pretty slippery to get ahold of (*laughs*). PCG



Quake II's puzzles are no longer confined to squishing players and tossing them in to monster filled pits. In this puzzle, you have to slip between blasts to proceed.



id's next project:

TRINITY

After *Quake II* hits the shelves, will John Carmack and the rest of his crew sit back and take it easy? Not bloody likely — id's next 3D game, code-named *Trinity*, is already being discussed. Though all of *Trinity*'s code only exists in John Carmack's head, he was able to give us a few ideas of what to look for.

"The big visual thing that we're going to be getting is variable levels of detail applied consistently throughout the entire game," he says. "You can have big open areas, and indoors where there's huge amounts of detail on the walls. Surface rendering is the direction in which we're going to go." He goes on to explain how the amount of wall detail has remained the same from *Wolfenstein* all the way to *Quake* — "*Quake* just looks better because there's just more going on," he says.

Kevin Cloud is extremely enthusiastic about *Trinity*, and is exploring the game design potential the new technology is going to offer. id's Brian Hook feels that by presenting such a complex and interactive world, users will be more tempted to blow it up and tear it apart, bit by bit — one of the features being discussed with *Trinity* is the ability to blow out a building's support structure and bring the whole thing down.

Carmack is closely weighing the options in terms of character animation. The size of the polygons in a character is going to drop dramatically — possibly down to a single pixel per polygon — so the emphasis will be on 3D modeling rather than actual texturing. And how does texture artist Adrian Carmack feel about this? "Well, I guess I'm going to have to learn modeling," he says, laughing.

"What's going to be really important are volumetric effects — things like rolling clouds and atmospheric illumination," says John Carmack. "The notion that 'once you're in 3D, you're done' is a ridiculous notion. If you work the design around what you can do, it's a much better game. The next generation is plotted out for me in terms of what I want to attempt to accomplish, and I have vague notions about what's going to be happening in the generation after that, into the next century. There are a lot of exciting things coming."

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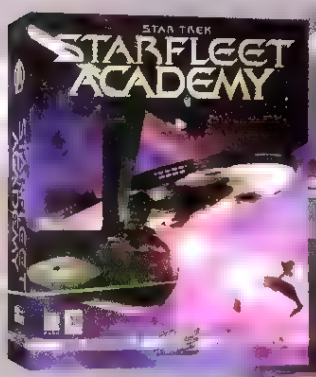

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Coming Soon

VOKECH _ _ _ _ _ _

6 10

1. Unscramble the names of the 3 legendary Star Trek instructors featured in Starfleet Academy.

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17

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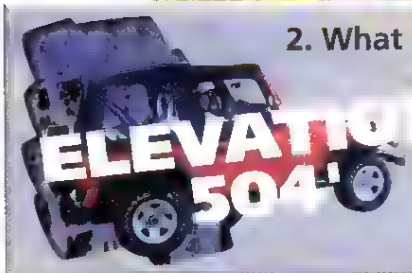

2. What sequel to the best-selling virtual game is so real it will improve your actual play?

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7

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PC CD-ROM

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- Gamespot

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MATURE M

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3. Complete the Redneck Rampage Word Search.

G	B	G	I	P	V	D	I	C	C
T	U	R	D	M	I	N	I	O	N
K	B	N	I	I	X	I	W	O	E
R	B	O	N	Y	E	R	S	T	I
O	A	D	R	A	N	O	E	L	L
P	I	N	E	K	C	I	H	C	A

Gun
Pig
Vixen
Coot
Cow
Turdminion
Bony
Yer
Leonard
Pork
Chicken
Alien
Bubba
Rind

5 letters are unused. 4 are the letter I. What's the 5th?

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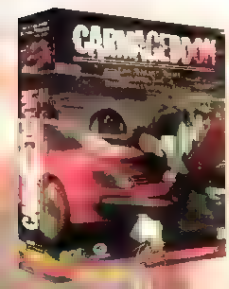

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HUDSON

4. It's an addictive action/arcade game, where you race against the clock to blow your opponents to smithereens.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS
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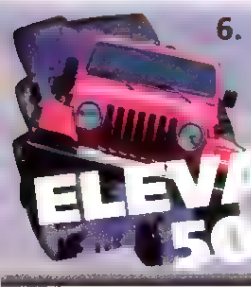

6. It's 12 of the greatest role playing fantasy adventures ever, gathered in one boxed set.

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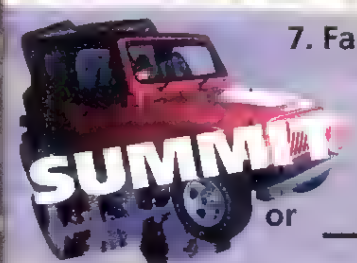

7. Fallout is a post-nuclear role playing game with over 50 mini-quests where you can target specific body parts to:

__ __ __ __ __, __ __ __ __ __ __ __,

or __ __ __ __, as __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __.

2 9

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Anachronox 139

Baldur's Gate

Descent to Undermountain

The Elder Scrolls Legends: Battlespire

Forsaken: The Thrall of Chaos

Might and Magic VI: The Mandate of Heaven 154

Return to Krondor

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who brought you vats of boiling oil:
Death by fire.
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Lords Of Magic
RP
The wizards behind Lords of the Realm II have divined a totally new game of magic, swords and sorcery and an arsenal of spells including Blades of Fury, lightning, ice darts, and deadly fire. So conjure up the free demo at www.sierra.com and prepare to torch thy neighbor.
SIERRA

Roleplaying Game (n): *(1) a game in which the players assume the personalities, or roles, of characters in the gameworld. abbrv RPG.*

Anachronox

DEVELOPER:
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PERSPECTIVE:
GROUP OR SOLO:

BACKGROUND

MAGIC SYSTEM

"The movable camera is so powerful, and all the *Quake*-engine games are strapping it to your head! We are going to use it in every way possible. It is going to rock."
COMBAT DESIGNER

COMBAT

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

The art is still in the conceptual stages, but the designs look promising.

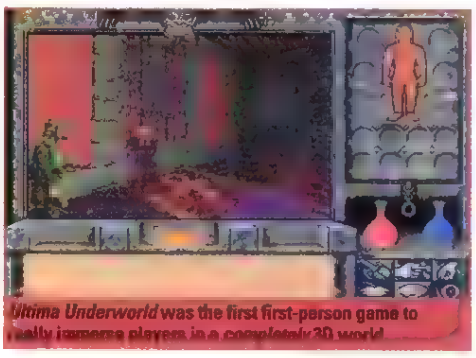
INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

Boots is the main character of *Anachronox*, although you'll find other partners to travel with.

ay WAY BACK in the mists of time (actually, it was more like the early 1980s) a little known computer game developer named Gary Gygax changed the way people game with his Dungeons and Dragons line of pen-and-paper RPGs. Groups of players would gather around a table and listen intently to a Dungeon Master as they spun tales of adventure, risk, battles, and developments. Each player controlled a character that would lead them to glory. As the story progressed, the players would become more and more attached to their alter-egos, even so far as to take on aspects of the character in their daily lives. The phenomenon quickly became the most prominent game for players of all ages during the reign of Disco. Any opportunity to avoid the Disco "scene" was, after all, very welcome indeed.



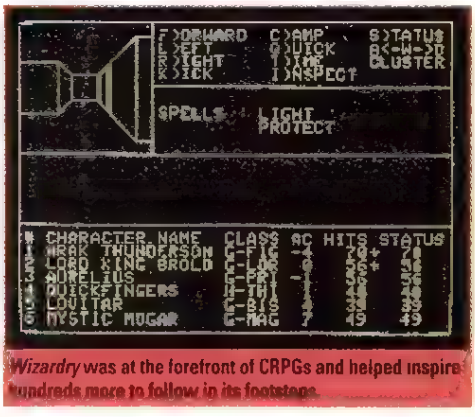
Ultima Underworld was the first first-person game to really immerse players in a completely 3D world.

But getting five or six of your close friends around a table on a sunny Saturday afternoon isn't the easiest thing to do, and with the advent of computers, it was only natural that roleplaying games found life on the most revolutionary invention of the last two decades. These games allowed players to partake in grand adventures, furious battles, and interact with huge worlds all on their own, solving the puzzles set before them by the ultimate Dungeon Master — the programmer of the game.

Many people argue about who and what really started the computer roleplaying game (CRPG) revolution. The very first *Ultima* game, programmed by Richard Garriott in his apartment on an Apple II, was the first to truly inspire a huge following. Along with Interplay's *The Bard's Tale* and Sir-tech's *Wizardry*, the trio created a revolution that would change the face of computer gaming forever. Ultimately, however, few could argue that it goes all the way back to the game that's made history hundreds of times over — Infocom's adventure game *Zork*. The game in which players controlled a solitary adventurer through a mythical underground empire, with its own history and colorful population, was the first title to ever really explore

the possibility of filling the shoes of an imaginary character on his own quest for fame and fortune. And being text-based, it allowed players to populate the countryside with forms of their own imagining — the core element of any pen-and-paper RPG.

The cycle of roleplaying games, from the very first text based journey that started in front of a small white house in the middle of the woods, through the revolutionary technology of Looking Glass' *Ultima Underworld* (which contained a 3D world in which the player could jump, fly, and look in all directions long before *Doom* came along) all the way to the upcoming graphic splendor and interactive 3D world of Britannia in *Ultima IX*, is a long, convoluted process, filled with as much miserable failure as success, splendor, and victory. From the hordes of *Ultima* fans, so enamored of the world that they created their own fan club called the Ultima Dragons, to the derision of repetitive dungeon crawl hack and slash games that require fast fingers on the mouse more than brain power, no other genre of computer gaming has fans that are as loyal, as demanding, or as fanatical as the CRPG. Why? Because no other genre of computer gaming is nearly as creative or as varied in both style and content.


F)ORWARD C)AMP S)TATUS
L)EFT Q)UICK A<-W->ZT
R)IGHT T)IME CLUSTER
B)ACK I)NSPECT
SPELLS: LIGHT
PROTECT
CHARACTER NAME CLASS AC HITS STATUS
1 HRAK THUNDERSON C-FIG -4 70+ OK
2 LORD XING BROLD C-LOR 0 56+ OK
3 AURELIUS C-PRI -1 56 56
4 QUICKFINGERS T-THI 1 48 48
5 LOUTTAR C-BIS 4 39 39
6 MYSTIC MUGAR C-MAG 7 49 49

Wizardry was at the forefront of CRPGs and helped inspire hundreds more to follow in its footsteps.

Todd Howard, the man behind Bethesda's upcoming *The Elder Scrolls Adventures: Redguard* put it this way. "Action, adventure, simulation, and strategy are all defined by the interactions you perform. A sim is going to simulate a real life experience, usually in a vehicle of some kind, and it's going to be real-time. It's the only way a sim works. An action game is going to emphasize reflexes and hand-eye coordination," he says. "Well, CRPGs are about being another person and developing that character. This says nothing about the interaction that's going on. It could be real-time, turn-based, overhead, first-person, etc. It could be anything, which is why it's constantly evolving. You can basically take any type of interaction and apply it to CRPGs." Take the difference between the older AD&D first person hack fests created by SSI several years ago, like *Strahd's Possession* or *Eye of*

Baldur's Gate

DEVELOPER:
PUBLISHER:
PERSPECTIVE:
GROUP OR SOLO:

Not only will *Baldur's Gate* look stunning, but the AD&D ruleset at the core will appeal to all pen-and-paper roleplaying fans.

BACKGROUND

MAGIC SYSTEM

"The roleplayers out there are going to find that the story is one of the better ones they've encountered — if not the best."
CHRIS PARKER
PRODUCER

COMBAT

INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

thousands of frames of animation for all the

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

We don't know for sure who this guy is, but we're pretty sure that he's up to no good.

MAN OF WAR

"MAN OF WAR petitions those aspects of battle many wargames are still dreaming of properly addressing."

Evan Brooks / Computer Game Entertainment

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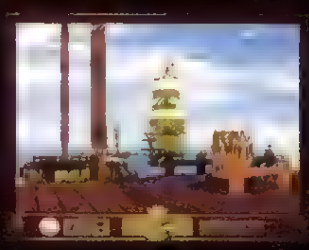

(Actual in-game graphics)

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Product Information Number 320

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the Beholder, and compare it to even older titles like any of the Ultima games from Origin or the Realms of Arkania series from Sir-tech. Then bring in the console RPGs, like the Final Fantasy or Dragon Warrior series, which contain virtually entirely menu-based combat and magic systems. They're all roleplaying games, but they vary greatly in their handling of magic, combat, perspective, character interaction, inventory management, and detail of the gameworld.

To first understand what makes a game a CRPG, you must first understand what defines roleplaying games in general. When it comes to the pen-and-paper roleplaying systems, it's pretty simple — RPGs are games that you play with a group of other people, where you take on the roles of characters in a fictitious world, and that world could be comprised of magic and monsters in a typical fantasy setting, a future of burnt-out post-apocalyptic societies, or a grand adventure through time and space

The weather effects in *Might and Magic VI* will make the game world even more believable to adventurers.

itself — anything, in fact, that the game creator's imagination can dream up. On the computer, however, the parameters for definition grow much wider. The game could be either real-time or turn based, first-person or third, with magic or without, with character interaction or without — you get the idea. In most cases, however, the true defining aspect of a CRPG is characters that can improve in skill and experience, whether it's spell-casting ability, combat, or any of a thousand other attributes.

Mark Caldwell, who programmed all but the first of the Might and Magic games from New World Computing, says, "Roleplaying is about your characters, and advancing those characters as they go through experience, training them in certain areas, giving them abilities, and watching those characters grow. It's about playing the role. It's about starting off with a low-life nothing, and becoming the king." In many cases, if a game contains all other elements of a roleplaying game but lacks that crucial character growth, it's considered an adventure game, such as Interplay's *Realms of the Haunting*. Even games that contain character growth aren't necessarily considered true roleplaying games — not many people refer to Sierra's Quest for Glory series of games as CRPGs, even though they contain character stats that improve over time, combat, magic, and many other RPG elements. Ultimately, what makes a

Descent to Undermountain

DEVELOPER:

PUBLISHER:

PERSPECTIVE:

GROUP OR SOLO:

BACKGROUND

MAGIC SYSTEM

COMBAT

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

The creatures populating Undermountain aren't always friendly, but in some cases you might get useful information from them.

"While *Quake* is mostly a projectile-based game, we have to go the opposite way, working on the recoil aspects of close-combat physics. We want you to feel like you're slicing a guy."

REGINALD ARNEDO
PRODUCER

INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

Several character races are available in *Descent to Undermountain*.

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

game a roleplaying game is up to the players' interpretation.

At the center of a computer roleplaying game, however, is the spirit of the pen-and-paper roleplaying systems that gave birth to the genre. In nearly all cases, the programmers and writers who create CRPGs had their start around a friend's dining-room table, rolling a set of dice with a group of buddies. Putting that sense of adventure into the computer isn't easy, but that's exactly what each developer is trying to accomplish, each in their own way. Julian LeFay, lead programmer and project leader for both *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* and *Daggerfall* has always seen that as the core of his designs. "People who create computer roleplaying games tend to look at other computer roleplaying games as their model, as the thing to beat or the thing to emulate. We never looked at that," he says. "We always looked at the pen-and-paper roleplaying games. That whole immersive quality that goes with them is really hard to get in the computer."

In the process of creating *Daggerfall*, LeFay, Ted Peterson (chief designer of *Daggerfall*) and a core group of designers spent hours playing a pen and paper RPG system they created based on Tamriel, the world in which *Daggerfall* takes place. After their gaming sessions, they would compare notes, and try to pinpoint the exact elements that made the pen-and-paper game so much fun. In the end, LeFay says, "we only got about ten percent of the pen-and-paper elements into *Daggerfall*, but it was still 10 percent more than anyone else was putting in other CRPGs."

So what's involved with making a roleplaying game? Obviously, it takes a lot of time — creating a whole fictitious world with enough history to be appealing to the player, and generating enough story line, character interaction, and quests to give the kind of depth players expect from a CRPG isn't the easiest task in the world. As Ken Rolston, a designer at Bethesda working with LeFay on *The Elder Scrolls Legends: Battlespire* put it "CRPGs are terribly complex, labor-intensive, resource-hungry, and lengthy projects, and the market has been perceived to be relatively small — so we haven't seen much genuine innovation or evolution in years." At the same time, the game has to work at the forefront of technology, because no matter how many people say, "graphics don't matter," archaic visuals are the kiss of death for a game in today's competetive market.

Different designers tackle this problem in their own way. Some might create a gameworld and a story to go with it and fit it into a new engine. Others create the engine first, and fit the game around that. Jon Van Caneghem, the creator of the Might and Magic series and founder of New World Computing is a strong supporter of the latter concept. He says, "If you write a script, and say this is what the game has to be, and then you hand it to the programmer and

Current Choices

MOST OF THE GAMES PREVIEWED HERE WON'T COME OUT THIS YEAR. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO TIDE THAT ROLEPLAYING HUNGER OVER FOR A WHILE, CHECK OUT THESE RECENT TITLES:

Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny

This one should be out by the time you read this. The sequel to *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*, Westwood Studios' *Guardians of Destiny* details the story of a lone adventurer seeking answers to his own heritage and his role among the immortals of his plane of existence. It will play a bit more like an adventure game, but the large gameworld and character growth keeps it firmly in the RPG vein.

Lands of Lore II will be a bit more of an adventure game, but the RPG elements are still strong.

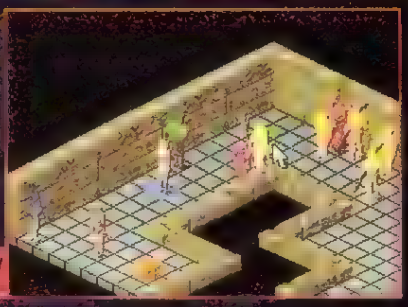
Betrayal in Antara

Sierra's newest RPG release, *Antara* capitalizes on the success of the *Betrayal at Krondor* engine. The game spans three CDs, so the world is large, and the solid interface makes play simple and enjoyable. For more information on this one, check out the review starting on page 214 of this issue.

Fans of the original *Betrayal at Krondor* will find a lot to enjoy in Sierra's latest, *Betrayal in Antara*.

Realms of Arkania: Shadows over Riva

***Shadows over Riva* concludes Sir-tech's popular Realms of Arkania trilogy, which started with *Blade of Destiny* and continued through *Star Trail*. Although it uses basically the same engine as *Star Trail*, which was released back in 1994, the gameplay is deep and the story line involving. The graphics aren't much, but if you're looking for a statistics-heavy, micro-manageable game, *Shadows* is it.**



The graphics might be blocky, but the gameplay is the key in Sir-tech's *Shadows over Riva*.

Fallout

Billed as "*Wasteland* for the 1990s," Interplay's post-apocalyptic RPG is one of the few that deals with the scientific rather than the magical. Originally using the GURPS license from Steve Jackson Games, the entire system had to be reworked from the ground up when Jackson withdrew from the deal. The combat feels a bit like *X-COM* or *Jagged Alliance*, and the third-person perspective graphics effectively portray the world after nuclear annihilation.

Interplay's *Fallout* is one of the few recent RPGs to have a sci-fi theme

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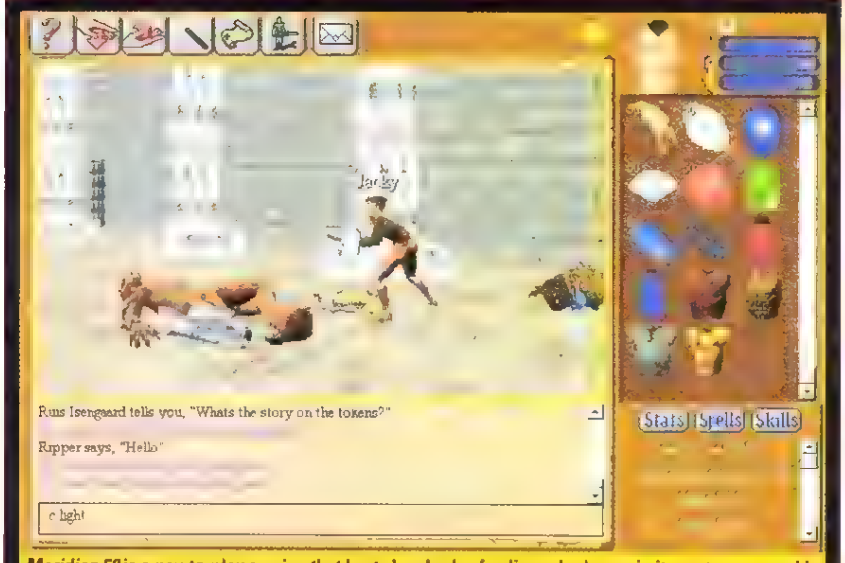


Meridian 59 is a pay-to-play service that hosts hundreds of online roleplayers in its vast game world

Just as computer roleplaying games found their foundation in text-based adventures, so too have online computer roleplaying games sprung from the text-based arena. Most commonly called MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), or MOOs (MUD Object-Oriented), text-based online communities have existed for nearly as long as the Internet.

Today, however, with the introduction of high-speed modems, high-speed connections to the Internet, and standardized protocols across much more powerful computers, the text has been left behind for graphic representations of characters in an ever-expanding, ever-changing world. 3DO's *Meridian 59* has enjoyed great success as an online RPG, and continues its growth with program updates such as *Revelation*. To a lesser degree, Sierra's *The Realm* boasts hundreds of users seeking solace in its colorful, almost Disney-esque scenery. Aries Online has *Legends of Kesmai*, and with Phase II of the much-hyped beta-test of Origin's *Ultima Online*, we're sure to see a surge of new online RPGs hitting the Infobahn. Many companies are planning to hop on the online bandwagon, with Bethesda contemplating putting its Elder Scrolls world of Tamriel online, and New World Computing is in the planning stages with *Might and Magic Online*. Even Microsoft is getting in on the action with *Asheron's Call*, an online RPG that could challenge the might of *Ultima Online* itself.

Microsoft will soon jump into the online fray with *Asheron's Call*.

The changes that have occurred to the online community are almost as varied as solo CRPGs. First we saw small MUDs contained on a local Bulletin Board System (BBS) and then larger MUDs with hundreds of players on the Internet. Then primitive graphics came into play with games like ImagiNation Network's *The Shadow of Yserbius*. Now, *Ultima Online* goes as far as 640x480 resolution with 16-bit color, and online RPGs such as AlterNet Realities' *Phoenix Armada* promise true polygon-based 3D rendered worlds to explore.

What does this mean for the CRPG genre as a whole? Most experts agreed with Sir-tech's Brenda Garneau's statement, "For promotion of CRPGs overall, I think it's a great thing. It's light, people will have fun, and hopefully, they'll become interested in CRPGs as a result," she says. But it won't spell the end of the single-player CRPG. "I think multi-player computer roleplaying will evolve into its own market, its own genre, because the demands for a single-player and a multi-player game are so incredibly different," Garneau says. If anything, the advent of online CRPGs will spawn a new interest in the genre, and the whole industry will benefit. Both platforms offer new worlds to the players, and new methods of exploration.

So many online RPGs exist online, it's impossible to list them all here. You can find several places on the Internet that contain information on upcoming online RPGs, and whether or not they're accepting beta testers. One such place is *www.geoslums.com/online/*. You'll find information on various games, how much they cost (if anything), and comments about them by the creators of the site.

engineers, and say 'fit this round story peg into that square programming hole. It comes out lousy." Rather, what should happen is the game engine itself is created, and after it's up and running, *then* comes the scripting and storytelling. David "Zeb" Cook, one of the original members of TSR and the senior designer of such legendary roleplaying systems as *AD&D Second Edition* and *Planescape* agrees. When asked about how he perceives CRPG development over the last few years, he replies, "In some cases the hardware/graphics capability dictates the design — 'Hey, look what we can do now!' CRPG design is a lot like paper RPGs were 10 to 15 years back — we're still discovering the tools and ways to exploit them effectively." Cook is currently at Interplay working on its TSR licensed games.

Richard Garriott's first game, *Akalabeth*, is considered by many to be *Ultima 0*.

Design is a mixed bag when it comes to RPGs. Since there's no set formula, programmers and designers are still floundering when it comes to deciding exactly how to approach things. But ultimately, it comes down to the designers themselves. In many cases, it can be one person rather than a whole team. Rolston says, "In my experience, it depends on the ability of one individual on the team to decisively communicate a central vision of the game. It can be an artist, or writer, or programmer. But what this one guy does is create a clear, defining example of gameplay that all other members of the team instinctively recognize as the perfect example of the spirit of the game." This theory is supported by the fact that some of the best known and most successful CRPGs were the original vision of one person, like Richard "Lord British" Garriott and the Ultima series or Van Caneghem and his Might and Magic games. Cook says, "Hopefully, teams start by making the game they want to make. Of course, marketing and everyone else has input, but the interface and styles are mostly chosen because that's the game the design team wants to play when it's all done."

That's the overriding sense one gets when talking to designers about their games. As Van Caneghem says, "I think that's one of the major things that make successes even today. People are building games that they want to play themselves, and they wind up being really good games." Which is exactly how he felt about the first ever *Might and Magic*. "I

was more interested in playing it than I was in building it," he says. "I think I spent more time playing it than working on it when I was getting close to the end. I knew I made something really neat at that point." Brenda Garneau, the writer creating the story behind *Wizardry 8* and someone who's been involved in some way with every Wizardry title, says, "Because we're game players ourselves, most of us addicts, we know what we'd like, and we really go to any length to try to give ourselves and our players what they want even and especially if that means changing things." It's this mixed bag that makes CRPGs so varied. Everyone has different ideas about what makes a game great.

CRPGs 101

Okay, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. Those who've played a computer role playing game before know exactly what's involved. If you haven't, though, you might be confused about what exactly makes a CRPG, and why they're such a big deal to create.

Considered by many to be the best of the series, *Ultima IV* introduced the Avatar to Britannia.

First of all, you have to have a background. Anyone who's played any of the Ultimas can tell you who is king, what the geography is like, and what the name of the land is called. They can rattle off the names of the Avatar's closest friends, and talk in detail about what makes the land of Britannia so different from our own, including the monsters, items, and spells that are subject to the physics of the realm. Just about any roleplaying game takes place in a world that the designers have spent weeks, months, and even years developing. And the more detailed the world, the more attractive it is to the player. Books have been written based on CRPGs, and CRPGs have been created based on books. There's a lot in common with both — the player, just like a reader, becomes involved in the story and can become attached to the non-player characters (NPCs). But often, a CRPG must contain much more detail than your average novel, if you take its interactive nature into consideration.

The effort to create worlds and write stories for CRPGs is tremendous, and is helped greatly by professionals in the writing field. This is one of the reasons why *Betrayal at Krondor* was such a success: it was based on the Midkemia series of books by well-known fantasy

The Elder Scrolls Legends: Battlespire

DEVELOPER:

PUBLISHER:

PERSPECTIVE:

GROUP OR SOLO:

BACKGROUND

MAGIC SYSTEM

"Most people who take the box off the shelf will buy this game. And I think you'll be hard pressed not to take this off the shelf when you see it."

JULIAN LEFAY
PROJECT LEADER

COMBAT

The high-res graphics and fast action will make *Battlespire* a more action-oriented RPG.

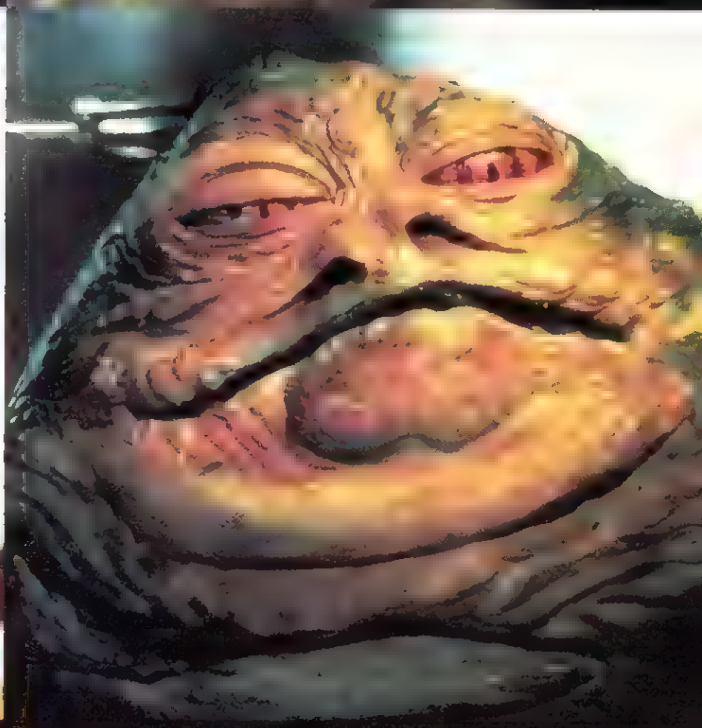
OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

Battlespire will support 3D cards like the 3Dfx for some amazing color and lighting effects.

INSPIRED BY

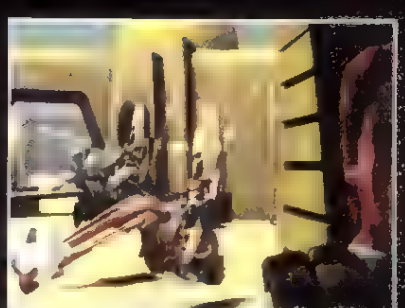
FUTURE POTENTIAL

BY MICHAEL WOLF

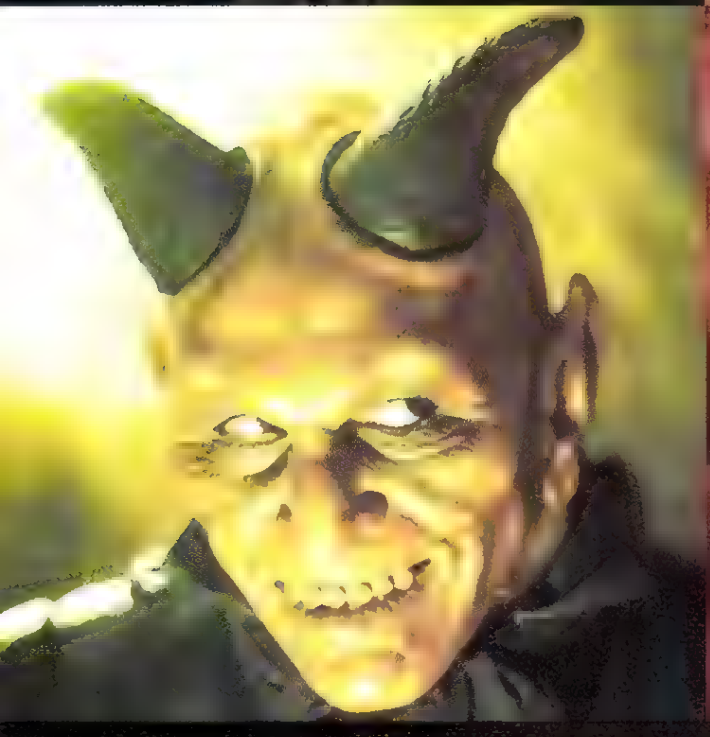


You're Dash Rendar - quick on the trigger of a blaster.

It's you and your tiny snowspeeder versus a giant, Imperial AT-AT.



Speeder bike mode - fast-paced action with a kick start.



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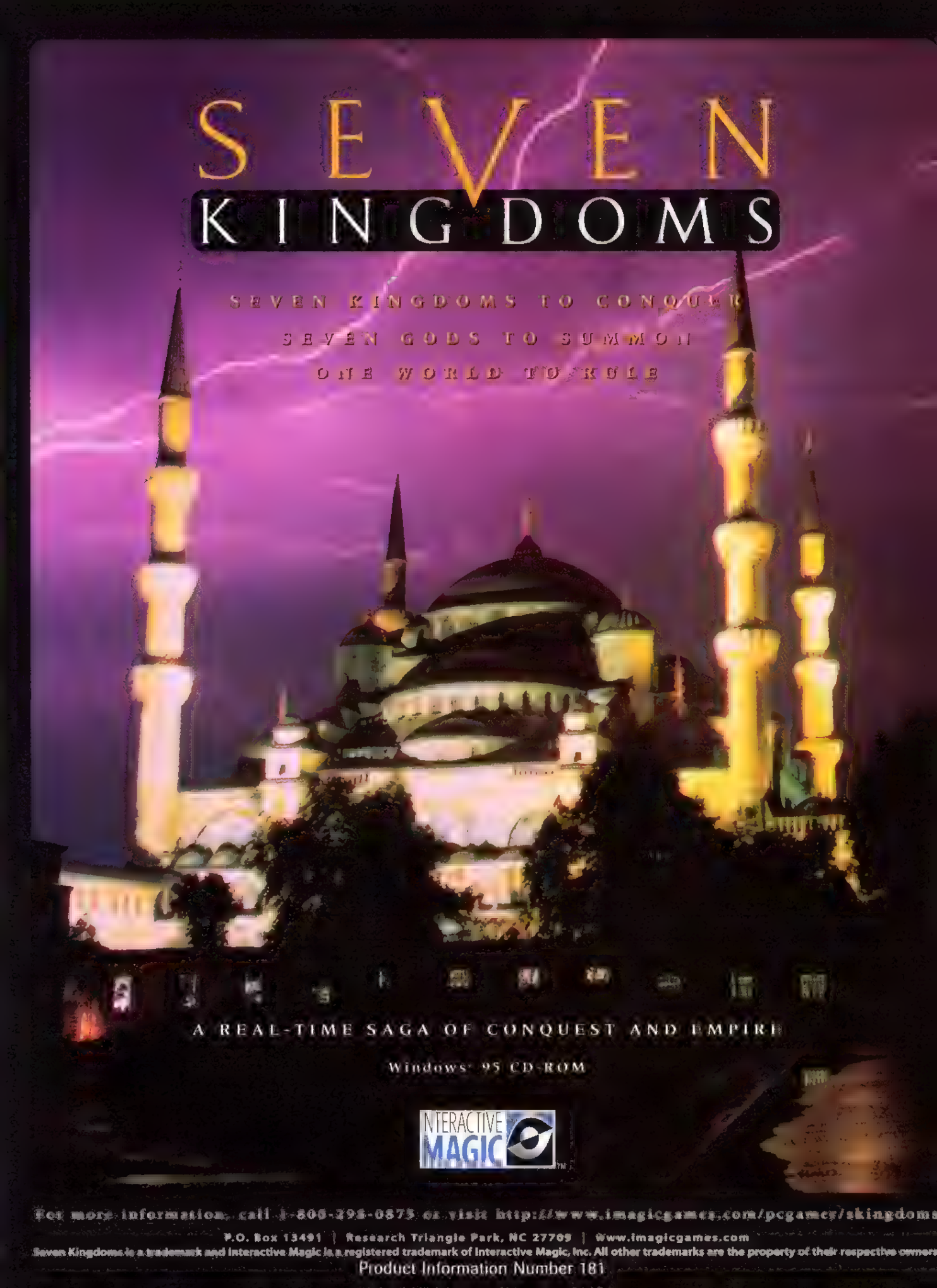
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Product Information Number 181

Forsaken: The Thrall of Chaos

DEVELOPER:
PUBLISHER:
PERSPECTIVE:
GROUP OR SOLO:

The lighting effects and 3D world makes scenes like this sunlit glade look beautiful.

BACKGROUND

COMBAT

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

"With *Forsaken*, I'd like to return to the era of plot-based RPGs — the story-based RPGs of old."

BEN COOLEY
PROGRAMMER/DESIGNER

MAGIC SYSTEM

INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

BY ANDRE VRIGNAUD

Fine 3D modeling and high polygon counts make these lizard creatures all the more eye-catching...especially when in action.

author Raymond E. Feist, and he had a huge role in creating the story for the game. His involvement with 7th Level's *Return to Krondor* will also show that professional approach to creating a story line, and he even plans on writing novels of both games.

As a result of the huge size of a CRPG game world, not all the elements that a designer wants to put into the game will always fit. For Rabid Entertainment's *Septerra Core*, Brian Babendereerde, the lead designer, says that only a third of what he's created for the world of Septerra will actually be in the game. That should make creating sequels easier, and makes the world you explore feel that much more real.

After the story, the next most important ingredient to any CRPG is the characterization. You are playing a role, and if you can't identify with your own character, then the CRPG has failed. The method of handling character interaction changes from game to game and company to company. The Might and Magic

Dungeon Master helped continue the tradition of first-person dungeon crawls with fast-action combat.

series has always used a party-based system, and for good reason. As Caldwell put it, "We like party-based games because they add diversity. You're not just a knight who can't cast spells. 'Oh gosh, I should have made a sorceress, because now I'm no good at spell-casting.' You can do all of that if you have a party. You can't do any of that if you have a single guy." But many games use solitary adventurers, such as *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*. However, in *Daggerfall*, the single player has purpose — as a member of society, you have a reputation with other NPCs, and you can own and sell property such as a house or a ship. Preferences for one system or the other are up to the player — some prefer the simplicity and immersion of playing only one character, and the feeling of really *being there*, while others like the diversity and complexity of manipulating several characters at a time.

In every CRPG, you will encounter combat. It doesn't matter what world you're in or what characters you control, you're going to have to fight somebody or something sooner or later. Every game handles combat differently — Sierra's *Betrayal in Antara* and Sir-tech's *Shadows Over Riva* both use turn-based combat over a grid. You face the enemy over a battlefield, and characters take

turns to attack and defend. This makes for more strategic battles, but many complain that it breaks the suspension of disbelief, especially when (as is the case with both those games) the rest of the game is played from a first person perspective. On the other hand, you have the real-time mouse click fests of old, such as in SSI's AD&D games, or in *Daggerfall*, where a movement of the mouse swings a weapon or casts a spell at an approaching monster. Interplay's *Descent to Undermountain* will continue that tradition, using its action-oriented 3D engine (the same one used in the sci fi action title *Descent*) to make the game a very combat based adventure, as will Bethesda's *TES Legends: Battlespire*.

However, it seems that many games are finding a balance between the two. In Rabid Entertainment's *Septerra Core*, for example, combat will seem almost turn-based, but it will transpire in real-time, since each character will have an "endurance level" which will determine the rate and power of the attack. Wait a bit longer for the level to rise, and you'll have a stronger attack. Of course, the enemy could be hammering away at you while you wait. In the end, the combat will feel turn-based, but the adrenaline will still pump as you try to time your attacks accordingly.

Might and Magic VI will allow players to choose whether they want to play in a real-time world, or a turn based one. In previous Might and Magic games time would move only when the players did, and combat was always turn-based. In the new game, though, players can choose between the two "on the fly" with a simple keypress. That means you don't have to go through the rigmarole of having an extended combat session with creatures your party could kill with a spit-wad — you can set off a fireball while walking down a hall and be done with it. However, when you face a truly formidable enemy, you have time to think about your attack and plan accordingly. Just like the graphics and technology of CRPGs, the old ways of accomplishing tasks are being addressed, and these games are examples of CRPGs slowly revolutionizing the traditional approaches to combat.

Also varied in just about every CRPG is the magic system. From the reagent based spells in the Ultima series to the bizarre and exciting new method of combining spells in *Septerra Core*, just about everything has been tried and tested over the years. Not all CRPGs contain magic, just as not all CRPGs take place in a magical fantasy setting, but the constant evolution of magic handling systems is seen throughout the genre. In the Ultima games, you need to gather ingredients to cast spells. With Eidos' new *Forsaken*, you need to find talismans of power that will provide new aspects of magic and add power to existing spells. *Betrayal in Antara* has a spell research system that lets you create

Might and Magic VI:

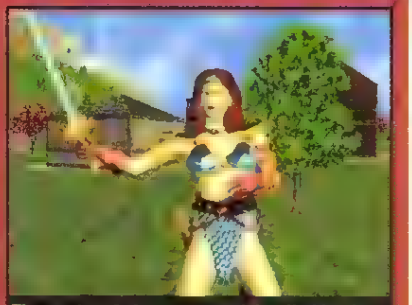
THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

DEVELOPER:

PUBLISHER:

PERSPECTIVE:

GROUP OR SOLO:



The rendered characters and detailed backgrounds could make *Might and Magic VI* the prettiest RPG of the lot.

BACKGROUND

After a meteor lands near [illegible] of a horde of demons that descend on the unsuspecting populace. Finding sanctuary in an old wiz[illegible]

"I've created a game that I want to play."

JON VAN CANEGHEM
PRESIDENT, NEW WORLD COMPUTING

COMBAT

The inside engine might be different, but the characters and textures remain stunning.

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

MAGIC SYSTEM

You certainly don't want to be within arm's reach of *this* demon!

INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

BY MICHAEL WOLF

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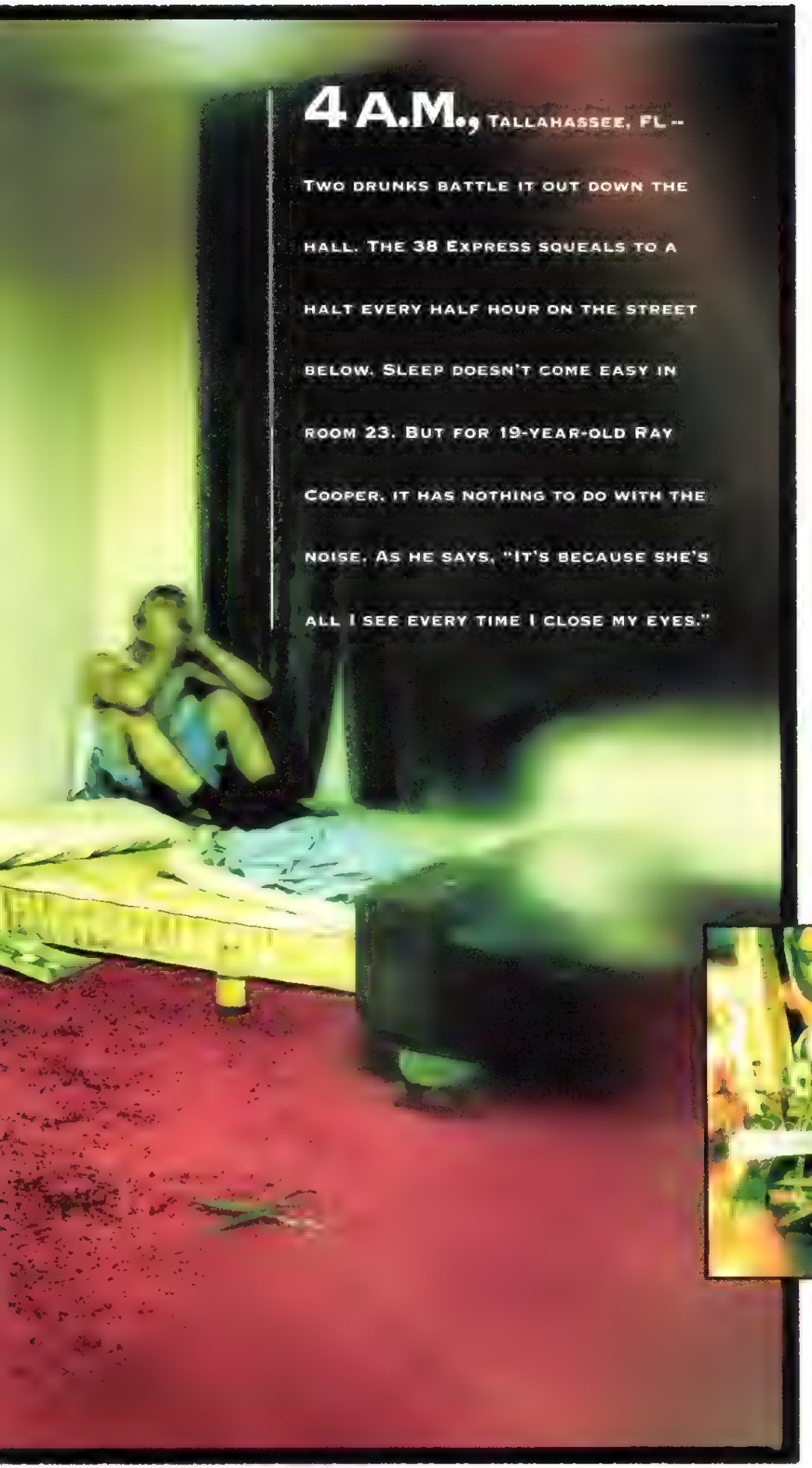
Product Information Number 147

Top: The Second Coming, slated for this fall. **Bottom:** Preparing for her return. **Opp page:** Committed for life


4 A.M., TALLAHASSEE, FL --
TWO DRUNKS BATTLE IT OUT DOWN THE HALL. THE 38 EXPRESS SQUEALS TO A HALT EVERY HALF HOUR ON THE STREET BELOW. SLEEP DOESN'T COME EASY IN ROOM 23. BUT FOR 19-YEAR-OLD RAY COOPER, IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE NOISE. AS HE SAYS, "IT'S BECAUSE SHE'S ALL I SEE EVERY TIME I CLOSE MY EYES."

Eidos Interactive. Tomb Raider, Lara Croft and her likeness are trademarks of Eidos, Plc ©1997 Eidos

spells by combining elements of magic such as fire, wind, and range to create a fireball. *Might and Magic VI* will work similarly, though it promises more user input. *Septerra Core* relies on individual spell "cards" — casting these in conjunction with other characters using different cards, you can create different spell effects, and with 124 cards in the game, the combinations are almost limitless. *Daggerfall* allows you to create your own spells by mixing magical elements in its Spell Maker, letting you determine the casting cost, power, and duration as you see fit. Magic eventually comes down to the preferences of the designer, and whether a player likes it or not is dependent on how well the system works within the game itself. No one can really say one system is better than another, only that they *prefer* one system over another. That's what makes exploring the magic of CRPGs so exciting

Septerra Core will help bring console RPG elements to the PC roleplaying genre.

The Great Depression

The complaint has plagued the Internet, gaming magazines, and was a wail heard around the world for the last few years

where have all the good roleplaying games gone? Since Sierra's *Betrayal at Krondor*, few roleplaying titles have hit the market, and of those, even fewer were worth writing home about. Until the arrival of Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*, Blizzard's *Diablo* and Blue Byte's *Albion*, there has been a sad lack of fun, interactive, enthralling CRPGs in recent times.

But the times, they are a'changing — Sierra finally released *Betrayal in Antara* which uses the old *Betrayal at Krondor* engine with lots of modern tweaks (see page 214 for a full review), and Interplay's new post apocalyptic CRPG *Fallout* should be on store shelves by the time you read this, along with Westwood's eagerly-awaited *Lands of Lore Guardians of Destiny*. *Realms of Arkania Shadows over Riva* was recently released to thunderous applause, while the whole online RPG market, with New World Computing's *Meridian 59*, Sierra's *The*

Return to Krondor

DEVELOPER:

PUBLISHER:

PERSPECTIVE:

GROUP OR SOLO:

BACKGROUND

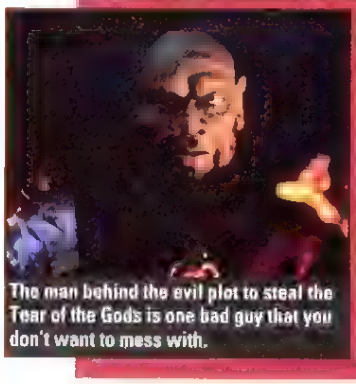
The rendered backgrounds add depth and detail to Feist's fantasy world.

"Rather than being a standard RPG where you make up your own character, we have characters with real histories, backgrounds, and ties to the world — so they react to actions the way a real character would."

CRAIG BOLIN
PRODUCER

MAGIC SYSTEM

COMBAT



The man behind the evil plot to steal the Tear of the Gods is one bad guy that you don't want to mess with.

INSPIRED BY

FUTURE POTENTIAL

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

Realms and Phase II of Origin's *Ultima Online* currently in action as of this writing, is undergoing a tremendous growth spurt. The drought is nearly over, folks, and store shelves will soon be filled to overflowing with RPGs. But why did the drought happen in the first place?

The responses to this question were mixed. Some say it's because the frenzy of first-person shooters inspired by *Doom* made developing CRPGs in an action dominated market unfeasible. Garriott, the creator of the Ultima series and founder of Origin Systems, points out that the *Doom* market so overwhelmed players that no one had the time to really develop CRPGs like they used to. The genre didn't die out, some feel the market started to become obsolete. As Caldwell put it, "The problem is that you have these 14-year-old Nintendo players that are now graduating from college and having a PC and wanting similar types of games to play." But, as Garriott says, "The levels of sophistication are rising." And sophistication is the key to making roleplaying games prominent on the PC. As Peterson puts it, "To software executives the term 'roleplaying elements' equals depth, which is what so many gamers are crying out for in loud, strident voices. On the other hand, they're nervous about getting behind a true roleplaying game because, with the exception of *Diablo* and to a lesser extent *Daggerfall*, they haven't been huge money makers in recent years." And now that Pentium machines with MMX and 3D accelerator cards make action games faster, prettier, and more complex on the PC than on the console systems, the brass at the Nintendo, Sega, and PlayStation are going to start looking toward PCs for the fast-paced titles they're used to playing. But every thing changes over time, and even the young kid who spent hours beating *Legend of Zelda* wants something with a bit more playability and complexity.

While computer technologies have grown to make action games as successful as they are, the same technologies have not yet reached a point where the designers of RPGs can have a stable gaming engine that won't be outdated by the time the game hits shelves. That's the main reason why it's taken so long to create *Might and Magic VI*, according to Van Caneghem. "With the technology changing with the 3D stuff, I couldn't really get a handle on anything for *Might and Magic VI*." He points out that every time his team came up with a game engine and started building a story to go with it, the technology would have been obsolete by the time it hit store shelves so production would be cancelled.

The same scenario has happened to Origin and *Ultima IX*, and to Sir-tech with *Wizardry 8*. Bethesda's Rolston says, "I think the main factors in the dry spell are the long development times involved, the uncertainties of the market, the rapid pace of technological change,

Computer Roleplaying Timeline

THE HISTORY OF COMPUTER ROLEPLAYING GAMES IS A RELATIVELY SHORT ONE, BUT IN THAT TIME THERE HAS BEEN TREMENDOUS CHANGE AND VARIETY. THIS IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE MORE PROMINENT GAMES AND EVENTS THAT HAVE AFFECTED TODAY'S CRPGs. IT IS BY NO MEANS COMPREHENSIVE, SINCE IT DOESN'T INCLUDE THE HUGE NUMBER OF ONLINE AND SHAREWARE CRPGs, BUT SOME OF THE BIGGEST COMMERCIAL RELEASES ARE LISTED, AS WELL AS SOME FANTASTIC LESSER-KNOWNS.

1965 J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* published in paperback, and soon becomes immensely popular

1973 Donald Kaye and Gary Gygax form the game publishing company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR)

1974 Dungeons and Dragons first published

1976 TSR's *The Dragon* magazine first published

1979 *Akalabeth: World of Doom* (Richard Garriott's first game)

1980 *Ultima I* (Origin)
Steve Jackson Games founded

1981 *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord* (Sir-tech)

1982 *Ultima II: The Revenge of the Enchantress* (Origin)
Wizardry II: Knight of Diamonds (Sir-tech)

1984 *Wizardry III: The Legacy of Llylgamyn* (Sir-tech)

1985 *The Bard's Tale: Tales of the Unknown* (Electronic Arts)

1986 *The Bard's Tale II: The Destiny Knight* (Electronic Arts)
Ultima III: Exodus (Origin)
Wasteland (Interplay)

1987 *Dungeon Master* (Interplay)
Final Fantasy (SquareSoft)
SSI enters contract with TSR to make AD&D titles

1988 *Might and Magic I* (New World Computing)
The Bard's Tale III: The Thief of Fate (Electronic Arts)
Ultima IV: The Quest of the Avatar (Origin)
Wizardry V: Heart of the Maelstrom (Sir-tech)
Forgotten Realms: Pool of Radiance (SSI)

1989 *Forgotten Realms: Curse of the Azure Bonds* (SSI)
Might and Magic II (New World Computing)
Hillsfar (SSI)

1990 *Quest for Glory I: So You Want to be a Hero?* (Sierra)
Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny (Origin)
Ultima VI: The False Prophet (Origin)
Wizardry VI: Bane of the Cosmic Forge (Sir-tech)
Worlds of Ultima: The Savage Empire (Origin)
Forgotten Realms: Secret of the Silver Blades (SSI)

1991 *Eye of the Beholder* (SSI)
Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra (New World Computing)
Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire (Sierra)
Worlds of Ultima 2: Martian Dreams (Origin)

1991 *Forgotten Realms: Pools of Darkness* (SSI)
Eye of the Beholder II: The Legend of Darkmoon (SSI)
Gateway to the Savage Frontier (SSI)

1992 *Darklands* (MicroProse)
Might and Magic IV: Clouds of Xeen (New World Computing)
Quest for Glory III: Wages of War (Sierra)
Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss (Origin)
Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds (Origin)
Ultima VII Part I: The Black Gate (Origin)
Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant (Sir-tech)
Treasures of the Savage Frontier (SSI)

1993 *Betrayal at Krondor* (Sierra)
Dark Sun I: Shattered Lands (SSI)
Eye of the Beholder III: Assault of Myth Drannor (SSI)
Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos (Westwood Studios)
Dungeon Hack (SSI)
Might and Magic V: Darkside of Xeen (New World Computing)
Realms of Arkania: Blade of Destiny (Sir-tech)
The Elder Scrolls: Arena (Bethesda Softworks)
Ultima VII Part II: Serpent Isle (Origin)
Menzoberranzan (SSI)

1994 SSI loses AD&D license
Dark Sun II: Wake of the Ravager (SSI)
Quest for Glory IV: Shadows of Darkness (Sierra)
Realms of Arkania: Star Trail (Sir-tech)
Ravenloft I: Strahd's Possession (SSI)
System Shock (Origin)
Ultima VIII: Pagan (Origin)
Al-Qadim: Genie's Curse (SSI)

1995 Interplay picks up AD&D license for Planescape and Forgotten Realms
Chrono Trigger (SquareSoft)
Ravenloft II: Stone Prophet (SSI)
Anvil of Dawn (New World Computing)
Dungeon Master II: Legend of Skullkeep (Interplay)
Entomorph (SSI)
Stonekeep (Interplay)
Thunderscape (SSI)

1996 *Albion* (Blue Byte)
Deathkeep (SSI)
Diablo (Blizzard)
Nemesis: The Wizardry Adventure (Sir-tech)
Realms of Arkania: Shadows Over Riva (Sir-tech)
The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall (Bethesda Softworks)
Wizardry Gold (Sir-tech)

1997 *Betrayal at Antara* (Sierra)
Blood & Magic (Interplay)

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Product Information Number 329

Septerra Core

DEVELOPER:
PUBLISHER:
PERSPECTIVE:
GROUP OR SOLO:

"I didn't want another game where you had to stand on your head to do something."
BRIAN
DESIGNER

OUTSTANDING QUALITIES

BACKGROUND

MAGIC SYSTEM

INSPIRED BY

COMBAT

FUTURE POTENTIAL

Led is one of the main characters of the story, and quite a mechanic, to boot!

BY MICHAEL WOLF

The large sprites and luscious backgrounds make *Septerra Core* one of the most attractive RPGs we've seen in a long time.

and the challenge of keeping a team psyched and focused for years while laboring on a project. With a long development cycle, and the standards for graphic presentation and pacing changing every six months, a long-term CRPG project faces frequent disruptive evolutions. Delays and loss of focus are almost inevitable." It hasn't been until recently that the technology has solidified to create games that will appeal to everyday gamers. Even then, few will use the truly advanced technology, although Garriott mentioned that several changes will be made to *Ultima IX*, including support for 3D accelerator cards.

So why are we seeing a resurgence in the genre now? Perhaps it has something to do with the drive of the companies to fill the CRPG void. As Garneau says, "Probably the biggest reason for the resurgence of new CRPGs is just plain marketing, much as I hate to give credit to those guys. If there are no CRPG titles on the market, it's time to fill the gap. Apparently, many more than one marketing guy discovered that. Otherwise? Coincidence." Perhaps it's coincidence that fans will have a plethora of CRPGs to choose from over the next twelve months, but you certainly won't hear any complaints about there being *too many* CRPGs.

Where Do We Go From Here?

If you compare the games of today to the games of yesterday, the differences are staggering. If you look at the previews of the games coming up in future months, you'll see even more dramatic changes. What does this mean for CRPG fans? Hopefully it means a revitalization of the genre. But the technology that has held CRPGs in check for the last two years will not suddenly stop growing. As Rolston puts it, "Technology is a hurdle, not an asset, to the evolution of CRPG design." However, with the advent of all the new CRPGs, the designers now have the chance to use the core engines of today for the games of tomorrow, with more thought devoted to story and

Eidos' *Forsaken* will push the barriers of detailed graphics for a CRPG, as this gorgeous scene demonstrates.

The graphic splendor of *Wizardry 8* looks to once again revolutionize the Wizardry series.

depth. Just like Bethesda is using its well received XnGine that was tested with *Terminator: Future Shock* in its new games *Battlespire* and *Redguard*, New World Computing will do the same with the next Might and Magic game. Van Caneghem says that rather than spend 50 percent of the time on building the engine and the other 50 percent on the gameplay, they can now devote 90 per cent of their time on the story line for *Might and Magic VII*, which will begin production just as soon as *Might and Magic VI* hits store shelves

Bethesda Softworks is also pressing for a more revolutionary type of game play, which Rolston calls "Freeform Gaming," referring to an Australian form of RPGs which combines the typical pen and paper system with live action. This form of gaming was, to a slight degree, seen in *Daggerfall*. As he puts it, "The focus is on character, theme, and improvisation, freeing the player to determine his own goals and tell his own story in the setting. When translated to CRPGs, freeforming is letting the player discover and tell his own stories outside the main framework of the central narrative." This is the philosophy the creators of *TES 3: Morrowind* are attempting to realize

After the current technology becomes obsolete, however, we're likely to see yet another period of time where few, if any, CRPGs make it to the market. Barring the appearance of more revolutionary games that spawn whole new genres of gaming, like *WarCraft II* did for real time strategy or *Doom* for first-person shooters, we're likely to see a stabilization of the various aspects that make up CRPGs. Chances are, the momentum caused by the current slew of CRPGs will slacken as the online CRPGs become more prominent, and after every improvement has been made to the current game engines, the outpouring of solo-play CRPGs will wane.

But that's no cause for alarm. The games that we'll see in the next 12 to 18 months will entertain us for hundreds and hundreds of hours. We'll go to places we've never seen, and do things we've never done. And when the time comes for the game sorcerers to once again retreat to their dark caverns and concoct new methods for bringing us new vistas and new adventures, we can rest assured that when they emerge we'll witness even more wonderful creations, and embark on even more enthralling journeys.

PCG

The Future of Roleplaying

THE CONSTANT EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY MAKES PREDICTING THE FUTURE OF COMPUTER ROLEPLAYING GAMES DIFFICULT, TO SAY THE LEAST. BUT ONE THING'S FOR SURE — THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF COMPANIES THAT HAVE DEFINITE PLANS FOR NEW CRPGS, EVEN IF THEY DON'T QUITE KNOW HOW THEY'RE GOING TO CREATE THEM YET. ONCE THIS CURRENT WAVE OF GAMES HAS PASSED, THOUGH, YOU'RE SURE TO SEE MORE GAMES THAT WILL USE THE SAME ENGINES, AS JON VAN CANEGHEM TALKS ABOUT WITH REGARDS TO *MIGHT AND MAGIC VII* (SEE MAIN FEATURE). SIR-TECH IS DEFINITELY WORKING ON *WIZARDRY 8*, AND, OF COURSE, ORIGIN WILL DEVOTE A LOT OF TIME TO *ULTIMA IX* AS SOON AS *ULTIMA ONLINE* SETTLES DOWN. HERE'S A BRIEF RUNDOWN OF WHAT SOME OF THE GAMING GIANTS HAVE IN STORE FOR US:

Ultima IX

The final chapter of the Guardian trilogy, Origin's latest promises a fully 3D-rendered world to explore. The latest developments include a completely movable camera, and support for the 3Dfx graphic accelerator. Origin isn't saying much else new about this one, except that it should be out by the end of 1998. Once *Ultima IX* is finished up, Garriott, aka Lord British, plans the next Ultima game to have little or nothing to do with the the adventures of the Avatar. Rather, he hopes to lead the series down a new path, opening new vistas to the world of Britannia, and even use a new engine, perhaps combining the 3D view of *Ultima Underworld* with the online element of *Ultima Online*.

After Bethesda completes *Battlespire* (above), *Redguard*, and one more Elder Scrolls title, work will begin in earnest on *TES 3: Morrowind*.

The Elder Scrolls

After *Battlespire* and the action/adventure *Redguard* are both completed, one more Elder Scrolls game will appear before work truly begins on *TES 3: Morrowind*. After that, *TES 4: Oblivion* will enter production. It will be quite a while before we see either of the latter two, though, so any thought as to what might come after is pure speculation.

Wizardry 8

Slated for Fall of 1998, *Wizardry 8* will conclude the trilogy started with *Bane of the Cosmic Forge* and *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*. Featuring a fully 3D world and supported by 3D accelerator cards, the graphics promise detailed environments and beautiful landscapes. The game will also have new skills and professions, and the new character creation system will let you build your characters from the ground up, even giving them distinctive personalities. You can even import your characters from *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* and *Wizardry Gold*.

Wizardry 8 is still in the early stages, but it looks to be fantastic

The Dark Project

Created by Looking Glass Technologies, the same people who delivered *Ultima Underworld I* and *II* and *System Shock*, *The Dark Project* (working title) could be one of the best games to come out in the coming year. Anyone familiar with Looking Glass' track record knows how dedicated they are to creating great-looking, fun, immersive games, and this one should be no exception. The technology will allow for some astonishing realism — cold will freeze water, and if you heat wood enough, it will burst into flames. Look for this one sometime early next year.

Might and Magic VII

Once work is completed on *Might and Magic VI*, the team will immediately commence on the seventh title in the legendary series. Since they won't have to work out a whole new game engine (or two engines, in this case), the team can concentrate more on the story line elements, and gameplay factors. Many ideas are being tossed around for this one, but none that New World was willing to share just yet.

Final Fantasy VII

The truth is, no one really knows what's happening with this one. SquareSoft has been placing recruitment ads in game magazines looking for programmers to port its Playstation classic to Windows 95, but all attempts to contact SquareSoft or Square LA for more information have failed. As soon as we hear anything certain about this one, we'll let you know.

Who Wants Some Wang?

More levels than a Tokyo skyscraper.

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Hand to face combat mode: Kick butt karate-style.

Shadow Warrior is here. Lo Wang.

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#1 Freak fragger. #1 Mutant mutilator.

#1 reason to be scared of the dark.

#1 Son-of-a-Bitch. So say Sayonara to all the Ninja wannabes that have gone before and put on your combat sandals...

Lo Wang is coming to the Land of the Rising Sun to turn out the lights.

Shadow Warrior. The Zen is going to hit the fan.

"There's no doubt that Shadow Warrior cremates the competition."

GameSlice Weekly

Fog, multi-colored lighting, transparent water...total immersion.

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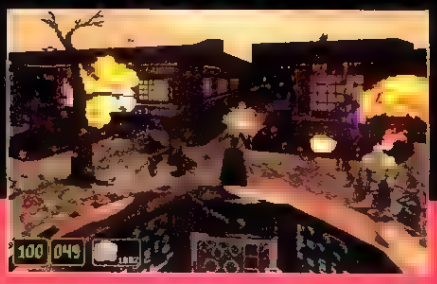

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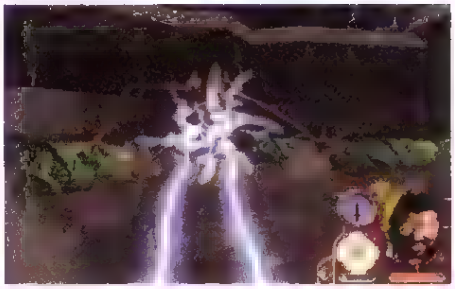

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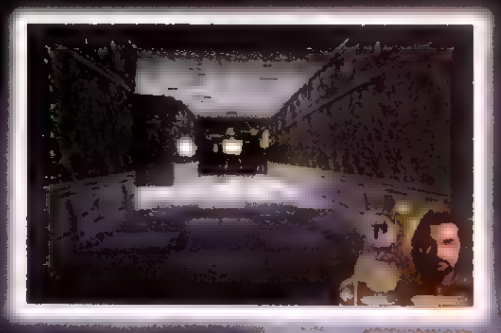

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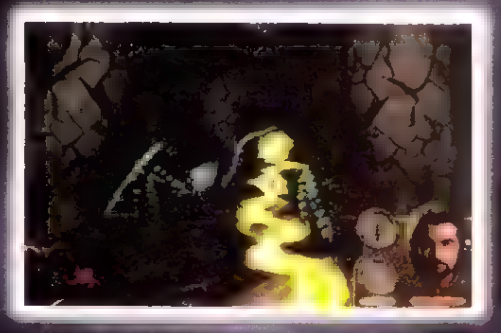

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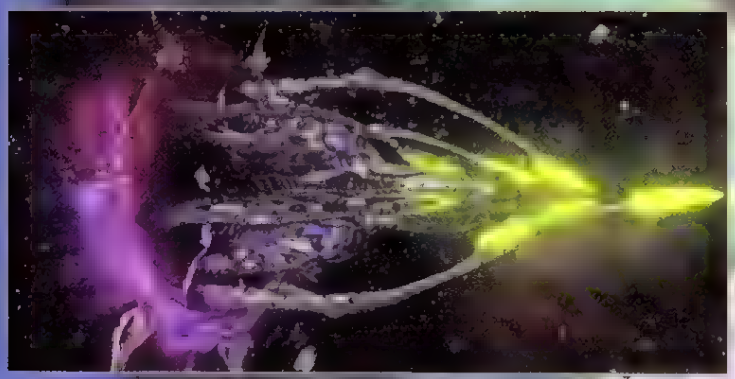

Reso

BY TODD VAUGHN

lution and Hyperspace

Since the premier [illegible] seven years ago, Origin has commanded the lion's share of the space combat genre with a blend of cinematic flair and explosive gameplay — and it's safe to say things haven't been the same since. The hugely successful series has generated spin-offs (*Privateer*), ancillary games ([illegible]), and even an animated TV show, making it the jewel in Origin's crown.

For some gamers, though, the sparkle has begun to fade. In recent years, the Wing Commander series has almost become a victim of its own success, with bloated budgets and over-the-top video productions threatening [illegible]

Now, following the somewhat disappointing sales of *Wing Commander IV* and *Privateer 2* and the departure of WC creator Chris Roberts (who left Origin late last year to form his own company, Digital Anvil), Origin has a new plan for its latest space combat epic. *Wing Commander: Prophecy* is set to bring the series full circle, with a renewed emphasis on gameplay that puts the player back where it all started, in a fast-paced dogfight against a sinister alien foe.

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Origin unveiled

Wing Commander: Prophecy to select members of the press at the Electronic [illegible] Atlanta, and nearly everyone who saw it [illegible] ers were up to something big — some [illegible] known Hollywood stars or huge budgets. [illegible] very different — from what most had [illegible] last year's Wing Commander with a [illegible] and a serviceable space-flight engine; it [illegible] with sleek new technology that [illegible] multi-player action, interactive mis- [illegible]

[illegible] prompted us to pay a visit to Origin [illegible] to take a closer look at *Prophecy*, and as [illegible] Project Leader Frank Roan and Producer David [illegible] *Prophecy* didn't just happen overnight, [illegible] coming

A need to fly

Wing Commander: Prophecy went into development almost immediately after production ended on *Wing Commander IV*, but instead of tweaking and refining the previous graphics engine and reusing the series' video-laden formula, the *Prophecy* team wanted to try and make a fresh start by taking a step back and examining everything that worked and doesn't work in earlier Wing Commander games.

In order to achieve that goal, the team says the "script first, game second" approach used in *Wing Commander III* and *IV* needed to be revised to allow more flexibility in game design.

The first order of business was to create kick-ass new technology worthy of the Wing Commander name. The new engine — dubbed "Vision" — is a stand-alone code base developed independently within Origin, and comes ready-made with all the features needed to make a state-of-the-art game: hardware access, polygon handling, sound and graphic manipulation, etc. This ready-made code base lets the designers create and tinker without the technical nightmares that usually attend bleeding-edge technology.

With the Vision engine, designers could develop new tools specifically for *Prophecy*, like an advanced mission builder that made it practical to explore a wide variety of potential gameplay scenarios. As Downing explains, the mission editor was a key component in developing good gameplay long before a script had been written.

"From a design standpoint, we wanted to make sure the missions stood on their own," he says. "For about the first six months, we didn't even worry about the story, we just concentrated on doing the missions. We designed about 100 missions for the game, and we threw out about half of those and kept the top 50 or so for the game. We wanted to make sure that the missions were the best around, and when we were done, we went ahead and designed a story around the missions.

"In Wing Commander games of the past, the mission design was done very arduously through scripting language," he says, "and that made it extremely difficult to go in during the later stages of the development to put elements in that would make the missions more exciting or more intense. So one of our goals was to create a mission editor that was very flexible, so we could easily go through hundreds of iterations of mission-tweaking rather than the five or six we could achieve when the game was in late beta."

Drinky poo? A new cast of characters joins you on the Midway for FMV delights.

The mission structure for *Prophecy* will work much the same as earlier Wing Commander games, with separate paths for either a win or loss. But this time around, you won't have to successfully chase down every target to win — there will be varying levels of success. In a nod to *TIE Fighter*, each mission will have its own set of primary, secondary, and tertiary goals, all spelled out in the mission briefing. If you've completed a mission and feel you could do better, you can hop right back in and take another stab at it.

The player and wingman combo that worked so well in previous Wing Commander games will return with a few new twists. You and your chosen wingman are no longer the sole saviors of the galaxy, you'll be part of large-scale battles, with multiple Confederation fighters and hordes of alien ships pitching and wheeling above the superstructures of massive capital ships.

Strikes against capital ships will now span multiple missions, you might fly one mission to disable the big ship, another to take out vital systems, and yet another to bring it down altogether. For the moment, the *Prophecy* designers aren't ready to say exactly how many ships they'll be able to throw into a single battle, but they're confident it'll be a lot more than Wing Commander fans are accustomed to.

Veteran actor Mark Hamill reprises his role as Colonel Blair in *Wing Commander: Prophecy*.

The Story

After nailing down the missions, the designers were faced with the challenge of building a story line around them, and the new plot takes the Wing Commander saga into its darkest reaches yet. The Wing Commander universe has always

Gorgeous animated sequences will accompany the full-motion video clips and help to round out the story with fast-paced, interesting action.

Ships like the Jaguar feature articulated segments that can move independently of the craft.

had elements of tension, drama, and mystery, but the setup for *Prophecy* delivers all of the above with a brand-new twist — sheer desperation

Shortly before the destruction of Kilrah (homeworld of the Confederation's cat-like nemesis in the first three Wing Commander games), Kilrathi prophets predicted the destruction of the universe would be orchestrated by an unknown evil. In the new game, that ominous prediction becomes reality when a sinister alien race storms the fringes of the Confederation's galaxy, destroying everything in its wake. As the seemingly unstoppable aliens methodically work their way toward Terra's most vital star systems, you'll lead strikes against the alien shield-killers (massive ships that can destroy everything in their wake) and fight off wave after wave of stealthy fighters, all while trying to learn more about these mysterious aliens in order to find their hidden weakness.

Renowned futurist/artist Syd Mead (whose credits include design work for *Blade Runner*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, and *Tron*) was called on to create the deadly bio-mechanical ships of the alien race, and the results are suitably nasty. Not only do the alien ships have a sinister look, but they've got sinister moves as well. The Tri-Ray, for example, is an alien heavy assault craft comprised of three separate ships. When under attack, the Tri-Ray will separate and attack the player from all sides; once it has the upper hand, it'll recombine to focus its combined firepower on you.

On the Terran side of things, players will have the chance to fly all-new Confederation craft and find refuge aboard a massive new carrier — the *TCS Midway*.

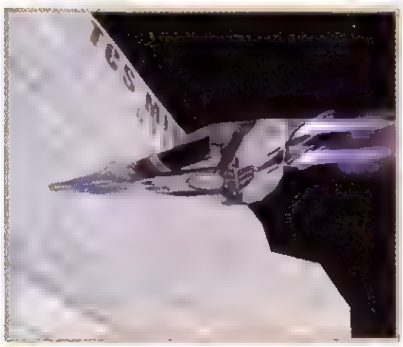
The Movie Question

Only after they'd resolved the gameplay issues of mission and story line development did the *Prophecy* designers focus their attention on integrating cinematics into the game.

Roan says the new approach to the "interactive movie" question should strike a better balance than in previous WC games, while maintaining the quality and epic scope that WC fans crave.

"When we went forward with *Prophecy*, we questioned all of the assumptions we had made in those games, specifically in terms of game flow," Roan says. "If you played the past two Wing Commanders, we would have seven or eight rooms of game flow aboard the capital ship. It

The alien ships not only look different, but they attack differently as well. This alien Tri-Ray separates to create three individual fighters.



This Panther looks tiny when compared to the huge TCS Midway capital ship.

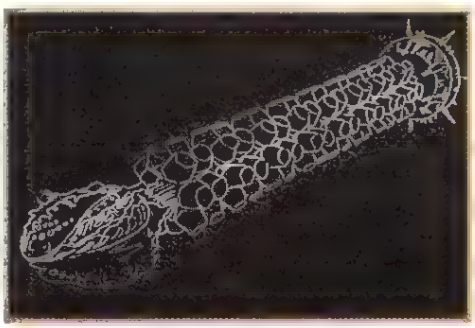
was difficult, given the space limitations on the CDs and the shooting time required, to really make a capital ship come alive. We had to populate at least half of those rooms with one person for all 50 missions. That added up to at least 200 different scenes for the characters.

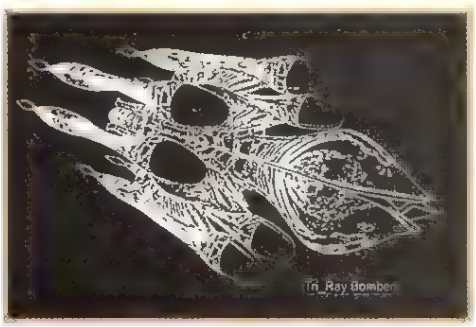
"We now just have two rooms in *Prophecy*, just like in *Wing 1* and *Wing 2*," he says. "This allows us to have lots of people to talk to, things to click on, the ready room is right there; you can even check your medals in the locker. If you don't want to watch the movies or talk to people, it takes just two clicks, and you're in the mission. Another thing we reconsidered was the movies. We think the movies are important to the pacing of the story, considering the epic sweep that it's taking, but we don't want them to dominate the game. To that end, we've cut down the movies drastically; they're not overbearing, and they fit in well with the missions."

For the filmed sequences, much of the cast from *Wing Commander III* and *IV* has returned (Mark Hamill as Blair, Tom Wilson as Maniac and Ginger Lynn Allen as your plucky mechanic), but *Prophecy* marks a surprising turning point for the series with the introduction of a new character to represent the player. Roan says the reason for the shift wasn't disappointment in Hamill's performance as old Blue-Hair (Blair), but a desire to give the player a larger stake in the game.

"We wanted to bring back some of the reward elements from *Wing 1* and *Wing 2*, like awarding medals for mission accomplishments," says Roan, "but we couldn't really do that with Colonel Blair anymore. What are we going to do? Make him president? Blair is still in the story to bridge the old Wing Commander with the new Wing Commander. It's kind of one foot in the past and one foot in the future."

Another significant shift from previous games will be the interactivity of the movies. Basically, there is none. Players will no longer make important game decisions in the middle of a sentence, and instead will determine the outcome by their actions in the cockpit. Thanks to the new game engine's versatility and graphic prowess, pre-flight briefings are now represented by the game engine instead of a vague film clip, giving the player a much clearer picture of what is actually going to happen when they head out on patrol.





Noted designer Syd Mead was brought in to create the menacing alien ships for *Wing Commander: Prophecy*. These early sketches show off the designs of two of the alien capital ships.

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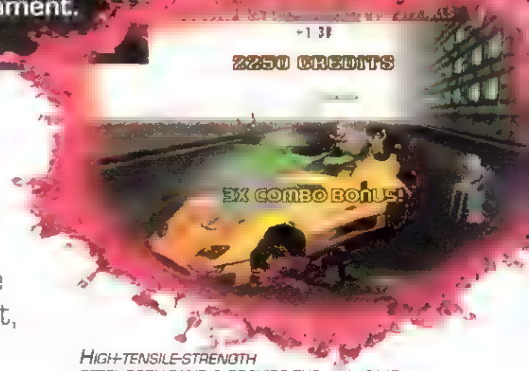

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Product Information Number 198

Expect to see a few familiar characters pop up in *Prophecy*, as well as a new character, Ginger Lynn Allen reprises

"The interactivity of the story we told in *Wing III* or *IV* was pretty much a binary decision you would make while watching a movie," Roan says, "but that's really a kind of storyteller's sleight-of-hand. You would see a difference subtly, depending on the decision you made, but it would rarely make a major impact in terms of the plot line.

"What we wanted to do is shift that paradigm so that the interactive decisions were actually made in the cockpit," he says. "Instead of watching a movie and saying yes or no, you're offered a choice in missions; which mission you choose and how well you do will have a dramatic effect on the plot."

Behind the Stick

Origin was too sheepish to provide us with screen shots of the cockpits and HUDs of the Terran Confederation's newest fighters — they felt the graphics weren't yet ready for public consumption — but our time behind the stick reveals that the *Prophecy* team is hard at work making the pilot's chair more intuitive and immersive than ever before.

In the early version we saw, the new Super VGA graphics are complemented by impressive new effects such as 16-bit dynamic lighting, which can illuminate ships and cast shadows in real time. But David Downing says that these effects are only the tip of the iceberg, especially considering the benefits of 3D acceleration.

"We're going to concentrate from beta until final code on adding as many special effects to the game as we can," he says. "The big difference between hardware acceleration and software-only in the final version will be the amount of detail we put into it."

Some of that detail is already up and running in the game, such as 3D-modeled canopy struts, similar to the virtual cockpits found in some of today's high-end flight simulators. During a flight around the superstructure of a carrier, the effect worked extremely well, with shadows dancing across the struts as we passed one light source after another.

Some refinements to the controls also make the game more immersive. The default keyboard arrangement will return with some subtle changes, but players may never need to touch their keyboards again. Shield, power, and weapons systems can now be checked and adjusted in mid-flight with the touch of a single joystick button.

The new complement of ships, which range from sleek, stealthy designs to heavily armored interceptors, looks very promising. And when combat heats up, players will find the changes are much more than cosmetic.

"We're using physics now, in the past, we sort of fudged to get physics in there, but for *Prophecy* we've basically brought back the power-slide," Roan says, referring to a more realistic ability to turn your spaceship's nose in one

direction while it continues to move in another. "There is acceleration in all your rotations; in previous WC games, during forward flight, you were flying a desk. You would turn at the same rate, and the turn would just stop when you let go of the joystick. Now, when you turn, it'll accelerate into the turn, when you let go, it will decelerate in the direction of the turn, forcing a power-slide."

Some of the ship designs will have articulated sections, such as the Panther's engine pod, which can vector from side to side, resulting in a yaw rate that's much faster than its pitch rate. So while the Panther might not climb at dive as fast as other fighters, it'll make quick, tight, turns when an enemy is on your six.

Capital ships like the Midway and the alien Shield-Killer will have articulated sections of their own, but won't use them for flight. Instead, they'll come loaded to the gills with rotating gun turrets.

Possibly the most notable difference between *Prophecy* and earlier WC games is the size and scale of the capital ships, which can only be described as enormous. During a quick flight over the superstructure of the *T.C.S. Midway* (the player's home carrier), Downing showed us the scale of the big behemoth in comparison to the single-seat Panther he was flying. Hugging the deck of the carrier — which, from this perspective, looked like a massive expanse of sharply defined metallic landscape stretching out to a black, star flecked horizon — Downing switched to an external view and pulled back on the zoom. Even at the widest angle, the screen could barely contain the carrier's total length, and the fighter — which seemed a virtual 30 feet long — was hardly a speck on the *Midway*'s hull.

So what's the price for all this visual splendor? Downing says that a Pentium 133 with 16MB RAM is the minimum system requirement for *Prophecy* without 3D acceleration, and a 3Dfx Voodoo accelerator would be necessary to see the game at its fullest.

Multi-Player Wing Commander

Prophecy is being designed primarily as a single-player epic, but it'll be the first Wing Commander game to feature multi-player support, including head-to-head and co-operative missions. Unfortunately, Wing Commander fans who envision hooking up over the Internet and battling their friends across the country will be disappointed, because *Prophecy* is so complex, it will only support Serial, Modem, or local-area network connections.

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Prophecy [illegible] aboard the *Midway*

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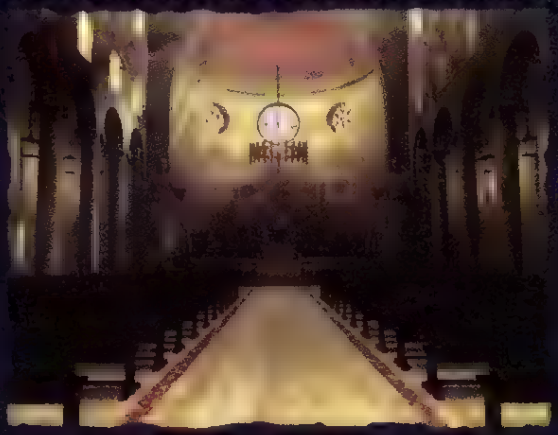

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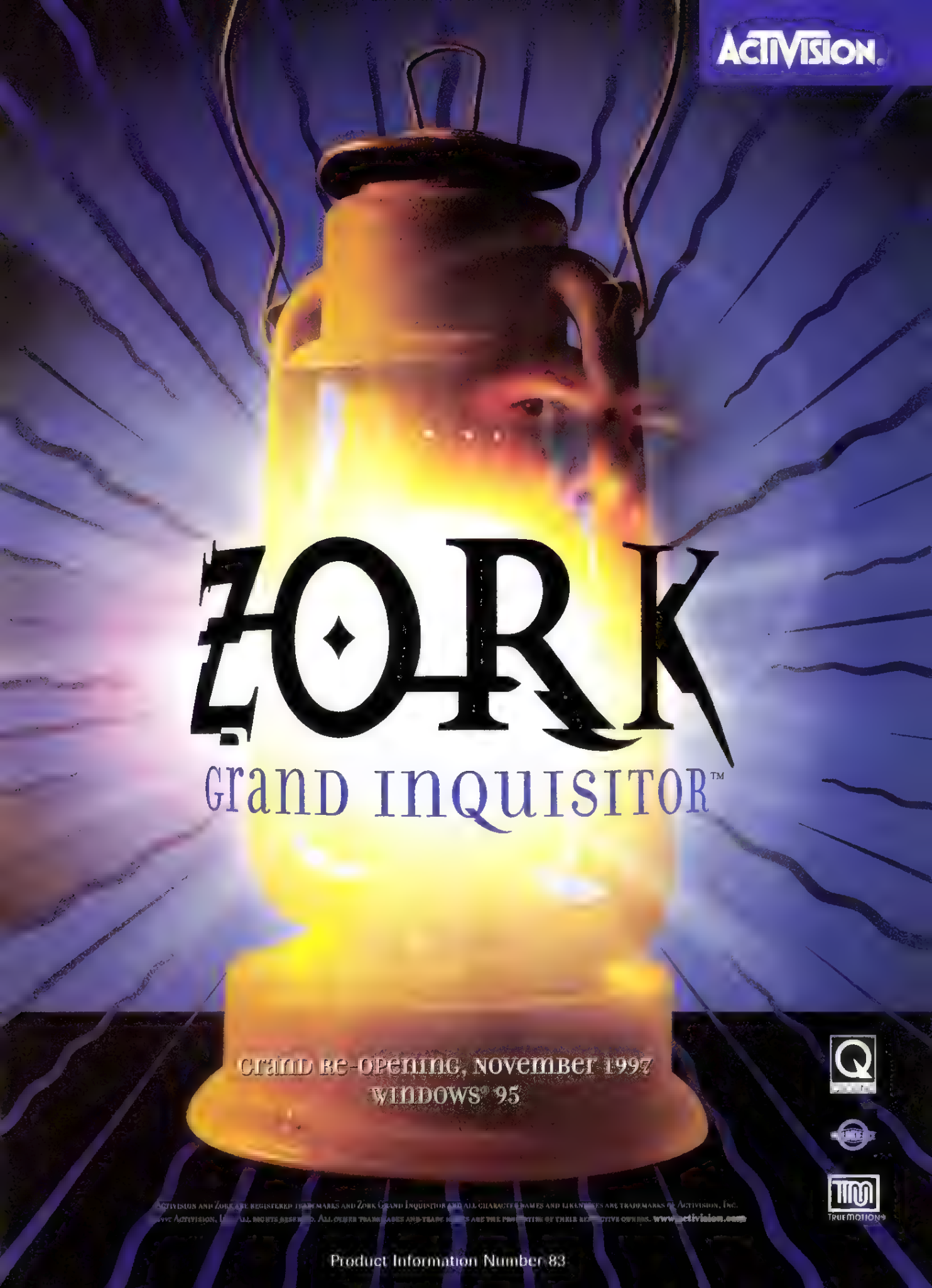

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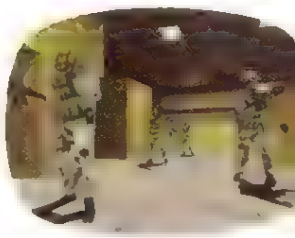
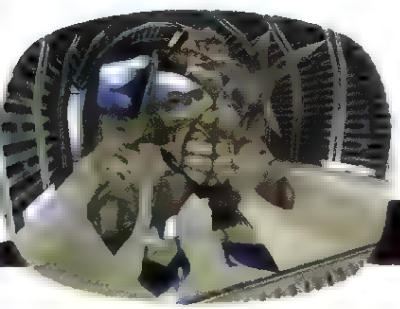
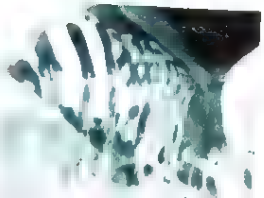




HALF-LIFE

ATE

Gosh-ers, look at the size of his... hands.



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Back to The F

As NovaLogic, Interactive Magic, and Jane's duke it out in the hotly contested military simulations market, MICROPROSE — the company that did so much to pioneer the genre — has been left out in the cold in recent years. But all that is about to change as the company prepares to retake command with the long-awaited sequel to one of its most popular sims ever. Yes, M1 TANK PLATOON II is almost ready to roll out, and it looks set to wipe the floor with its competition.

BY WILLIAM R. TROTTER

ront

MicroProse has had its struggles in recent years: mass defections, financial problems, some iffy and ill-considered products (anybody remember *Pizza Tycoon*? Anybody care?), and increasingly stiff competition in the strategy and simulation genres in which the company once reigned supreme.

But there remains a core of veterans still with the company, a lot of new talent has revitalized the creative processes, and there is a palpable determination on the part of everyone you talk to, a commitment that MicroProse will once again achieve its former glory.

Those are just some of the reasons why *M1 Tank Platoon II* is so vital to the company. The original game, released in 1989, was an immediate success and has come to be recognized as an enduring classic, a landmark in PC simulation design. The stakes are therefore very high. Not only will this sequel be compared to its illustrious predecessor, not only will it be going head-to-head with an existing product designed by two of the men who made the first game so great, but it will be under a pitiless spotlight from the moment it debuts. If it succeeds, it will send a dramatic signal to gamers and competitors alike: MicroProse *is back*!

So how *do* you go about designing a sequel to one of the all-time classics, knowing as you do that there's a lot more riding on this game than sales figures? The answer, according to designer and producer Tim Goodlett: "Very carefully!"

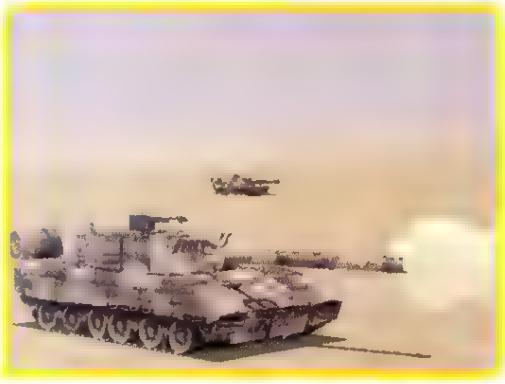
Heading the project is Scott Spanburg, one of the co-designers of the original game (the other designer, Arnold Hendrick, followed MicroProse founder "Wild Bill" Stealey when Interactive Magic was formed, and is, of course, responsible for the recent and well received *M1A2 Abrams*).

Both Spanburg and Goodlett agree that the primary consideration, from the start of the project, was to keep intact all the things that worked so well in the original *M1 Tank Platoon*. Despite numerous advances in technology since 1989, the basic concepts behind the original game were so solid, so durable, that no-one could really think of a way to improve on them.

"WE KNOW WE'RE ONLY GOING TO GET ONE SHOT AT THIS, SO WE'VE ALL WORKED VERY HARD TO MAKE M1 TANK PLATOON II A WORTHY SUCCESSOR TO A CLASSIC."

So the core-concept remains the same: you take command of a four-tank platoon of M1A2s and practice real armored tactics against realistic foes, while also controlling air and ground support units whose composition will vary from mission to mission. To succeed, you still have to master formations and maneuvers that have changed little from those practiced a decade ago.

Of course, the tank itself is different, and so — to a dramatic extent — is the technology packed into its turret, but these evolutionary changes (better armor and firepower, more advanced communications, the addition of the Commander's Independent Thermal Viewer, "smart" ammunition, etc) serve only to make the tactics more efficient, not different. Players of the original game will feel right at home when they climb through the hatch.



The Desert Storm II campaign will give players a chance to battle Saddam's forces across the desert once again

But they will notice one big change. "We decided, early on, to eliminate the driver's position altogether," says Goodlett. "If you look closely at how fans of the game actually played it, you'll see that very few of them spent much time in that position. Everybody wants to take over the guns from time to time, and everybody wants to be the tank commander...but there just wasn't a whole lot of excitement in actually driving the vehicle. So now you'll maneuver the tank as a real Abrams commander would, by saying, in effect, 'Driver, advance ten meters forward' and the tank will move accordingly."

As a corollary to this design decision, you'll no longer have to inch forward, clicking between the map and the view from the turret, to reach a proper "hull-down" position. As tank-sim fans know, this means putting your tank in a location where only its turret is visible to the enemy, thus presenting a smaller, harder-to-hit target, while still leaving the main gun unmasked and able to command the best field of fire available. In the original game, with its somewhat chunky and stylized terrain maps, this could be a vexing task. Not so in the sequel: tanks will automatically seek what's known as the "military crest" of any elevation and will stop just short of that invisible line, so that they *are* hull-down whenever its appropriate for them to be.

This relatively small design change is typical of the thoughtfulness that's gone into the sequel — it cleans up gameplay, removes a sometimes-tedious chore from the commander's plate, and yet does nothing to compromise realism. Going hull down is just something a well trained crew automatically does.

You control the tank with a combination of keyboard and joystick during battle; the mouse comes into play when you're

M1 Tank Platoon II promises some of the most stunning rolling terrain and detailed vehicles ever seen in a land based military simulation. The 3Dfx accelerator support will add to the quality of the visuals even more

HERE
CHICKY
CHICKY...

plotting maneuvers on the situation map displayed on the turret's data-link. If you so desire, in fact, you can play the entire game from the map.

Screens depicting the inside of the turret will be photo realistic and have a roomier and much more detailed look than those of the original. You can look around and see pretty much what you would see inside the turret of a real Abrams. Switches, buttons, and knobs all work as they do in real life

"WE DECIDED, EARLY ON, TO ELIMINATE THE DRIVER'S POSITION ALTOGETHER. NOW YOU'LL MANEUVER THE TANK AS A REAL ABRAMS COMMANDER WOULD, BY SAYING, 'DRIVER, ADVANCE TEN METERS,' AND THE TANK WILL MOVE ACCORDINGLY."

TOM HOGLETT, PRODUCER, M1 TANK PLATOON

But, while the designers are proud of this realism, they have not felt locked-in to it. As the combat situation changes, the screen details and point-of-view also change, in a rather cinematic and subtle fashion. If you decide to get behind the gun and personally engage enemy targets, for example, the viewpoint zooms in to the gunsight, just as it would for someone bending forward and pushing his face into the sighting eyepiece. After all, if your intent is to engage enemy tanks, all your attention would be riveted on that gunsight; you wouldn't see, or want to see, the controls arrayed around it.

The simulation is divided into the customary three parts: training, single battles, and campaigns. Using carefully modeled replicas of the Ft Knox training grounds, new players will be able to learn their skills through a series of carefully graduated exercises. The Abrams is a complex fighting machine, and you can't expect to jump into the turret and learn how to get the most of it through on-the-job training. Step by step, you'll learn everything you need to know, from controlling the vehicle to selecting the right ammo After the basics, you move to more advanced training, with vivid demonstrations of basic commands ("Move to contact!", etc.) and maneuvers.

Each step in the training process will be reinforced with videos, instructors' voices, and multimedia displays.

Five "future history" campaigns are included:

• **Gulf War Two** Sadam Hussein becomes convinced that it is politically impossible for the Western nations to put together another coalition. He doesn't bother stopping at Kuwait, but strikes directly into Saudi Arabia. All that's blocking the invasion is a US brigade that's deployed for training and an assortment of caught-off-guard Saudi units.

• **Lybia vs. Egypt** — The long-simmering dispute between these two countries breaks out into full scale war Egypt requests help from the United States. The guys at MicroProse seem to have had a lot of fun designing this campaign. "It's like the Afrika Corps all over again, only with contemporary weapons," says Tom Goodlett.

• **NATO intervention in a Ukraine/Moldavia conflict** — another one of the many possible crises in the former USSR, this campaign gives you the flavor of tank warfare on the steppes of Mother Russia.

• **The siege of Vladivostok** Breakaway Siberian nationalists cut the Trans Siberian Railroad and the legitimate Russian government asks for an American expeditionary force to land and help hold the fort until Moscow can mount a major counterattack from the east

• **The Warsaw Pact revives** — Ultra-nationalists take over the Kremlin and attempt to revive the Good Old Days by force But the situation gets complicated because many of the former Warsaw Pact nations are now members of NATO!

These all seem like solid, plausible premises for campaigns, and each is designed to be extremely dynamic. Your goal, in each, will be to inflict maximum damage on the enemy, while conserving your own forces as best you can. While campaigns will range in length from ten scenarios to about 30, all are predicated on the assumption that an armored war fought with contemporary weapons will probably only last for two or three weeks.

M1 Tank Platoon II is essentially a game of land-based armor combat, but the missions and campaigns will realistically include full air support and air threats, such as this Russian Hind

Ah, there's nothing like a good-old brew-up This action-packed screen gives some idea of the destruction that will take place in the more heated campaigns, with tanks and armored vehicles being blown up *real* good

KEEPER'S
HERE

With little or no terrain cover on open battlegrounds like this, the key to success is all about camouflage and concealement, and getting your tank into those crucial "hull-down" positions, giving enemies a smaller target to hit.

The computer will constantly monitor the overall situation and when one side is too depleted to realistically continue, it will declare a winner. If the situation becomes a draw, the United Nations will step in and force a cease-fire in place.

MicroProse naturally wants to implement multi-player options, but doesn't want to be too specific, at this point, as to what they will be. Tom Goodlett says, "You will certainly be able to join with three other players and fight against the computer, that much we're sure about. But we don't want to take a game of this scope and complexity and reduce it to a bunch of Deathmatches just so we can squeeze more and more online players under the same umbrella — that would demean the game and defeat the purpose. It would just be *Quake* with tanks. One possibility is that two players could compete, but from different levels of command — one player takes over the tank platoon, while his opponent becomes a kind of 'battlemaster' and conducts his fights from the map. Whatever we can do to implement multi-player, we will, but at this stage we haven't finalized anything."

There will also be a Battlemaker utility, enabling players to design customized engagements on any map found in the game. You can't create your own terrain, but since each map in the game represents 200-300 square miles, that shouldn't cramp your style.

One obvious question for the MicroProse team: how will their game be different from, and better than, I-Magic's *M1A2*? One area of confidence is the graphics, which several MicroProse people described as "awesome." Approximately 70 types of vehicle will be fully modeled, in richly textured detail, and the landscapes they deploy on will be more detailed and realistic. Far horizons gray-out, nearby terrain features have plenty of detail and character. Guns recoil, tanks shudder when they take a hit, wheels and treads rotate, and there's plenty of visual zip to the explosions, tracers, and brew-ups.

The AI also promises to be at least as good as I-Magic's, maybe better. All enemy units, for example, will be programmed to act according to the actual tactical doctrine of their real-life counterparts. Attacking helicopters will fly nap-of-the-earth, take cover behind ridges, and suddenly pop up to fire. And each soldier in the ten different kinds of infantry modeled in the game will be individually programmed to react and fight back.

Another interesting difference: players can elect to fight as U.S. Marine Corps expeditionary units, with a full array of amphibious vehicles and air support by Marine aircraft.

As icing on the cake, players can select which real armored regiments they'd like to serve with — all markings and insignia are available. Ex-service personnel will appreciate this personalized touch.

It is obvious that the MicroProse team has thought through this sequel very carefully – no rushing on to the market with another "me-too" game here! As Tom Goodlett sums it up: "We all realize how much scrutiny this product will receive. We're all aware of how much support there still is for the original game, and we all knew from the start that it would be a hard act to follow. We're only going to get one shot at this, so we've all worked very hard to make this product not only a worthy successor to a classic, but a showcase for what the new MicroProse is capable of creating. To all those players who've kept faith in us, we'd like to say thank you — we'll give you a game that's worthy of you." From what we've seen of *M1 Tank Platoon II*, these words are not spoken lightly.

PCG

This anti-aircraft vehicle will come in handy when your platoon faces incoming air threats

MORE NEW GAMES FROM THE NEW MICROPROSE

EUROPEAN AIR WAR

Due for early 1998 release, this simulation is a major update of another earlier MicroProse classic: *1942: Pacific Air War*. The new engine will feature accurate flight models of the Mustang, the Spitfire, the Messerschmidt and other WWII aerial legends. There will be 20 fighters in all, each with authentic cockpits. The graphics look sensational and MicroProse promises a very cunning AI. It's a mission-based game, with career options. The Battle of Britain gets a module all to itself. Otherwise, you can enlist to fly from April, 1943 until the end of the war. MicroProse has developed what it calls Virtual Cockpit Technology to replace the customary padlock views. This enables you to search the skies in any direction, just as a real pilot would. Multi-player support will be robust: modem to modem, or up to eight players on LAN, with as many as 32 aircraft flying simultaneously. A cinematic replay editor lets multi-player pilots review their missions from anywhere in the gameworld.

FALCON 4.0

Yeah, okay, it's been promised longer than the Second Coming, but it really IS coming out in early 1998. Since it's been "previewed" to death over the last two years, let's just confine our remarks here to information gleaned from the most recent Designer's Note, internal documents circulated within the MicroProse ranks. It's a Win95-native multi-player simulation covering a hypothetical second Korean War. Multi-player options are now finalized and include: head-to-head, LAN play for up to a dozen players, and Internet play over the Total Entertainment Network (TEN). At least 30 players will be able to participate in each online game, and hundreds will be able to fly in each online world. Network play is designed into the stand-alone game, too. Say you're in the middle of planning an important campaign strike when your friend "Joe" calls and says he's ready to fly with you. No sweat: just hit the "Comms" icon in the toolbar, select Joe's name from the dialog list, and the chat box will pop up with Joe inside it. Just drag Joe into any aircraft, and you're set to fly together. You and Joe can be wingmen, or fly in different elements of the same strike package, or fly different missions.

All players in a mission can assist with planning that mission, or you can designate one person to handle that task. Additional aircraft can be requested for a mission, in case there aren't enough slots for all the people who're lined up waiting to fly. The scale of the game is huge. You can fly from one end of Korea to the other, and see terrain up to a range of 50 km. The "level of detail" system reduces distant terrain detail so smoothly, you won't ever see any "pop-up" peaks or targets. The virtual world is filled with hundreds of 3D objects: every ship, tank, and gun in the U.S., Chinese, Russian, and Korean inventories. As for hardware requirements, you can forget about running it on a 486. The minimum system is a 90 MHZ Pentium with a strong 3D accelerator or a 166 Pentium with a good conventional video card (not really as fearsomely demanding as one might have guessed). The game will *not*, however, use Direct3D, because the designers simply could not get the level of performance they needed.

It's been a long time coming, but the designers' level of commitment and concern with detail is phenomenal. If *Falcon 4.0* meets their high standards, it could become *the* definitive modern flight sim.

It's time to be evil.

Evil.

It's torturing winged fairies with red-hot pokers.

It's sacrificing loyal trolls to please the Gods.

It's building a prison to starve hapless heroes.

It's feeling blood trickle down the back of your throat.

Evil is good.

Dungeon Keeper

EVIL IS GOOD

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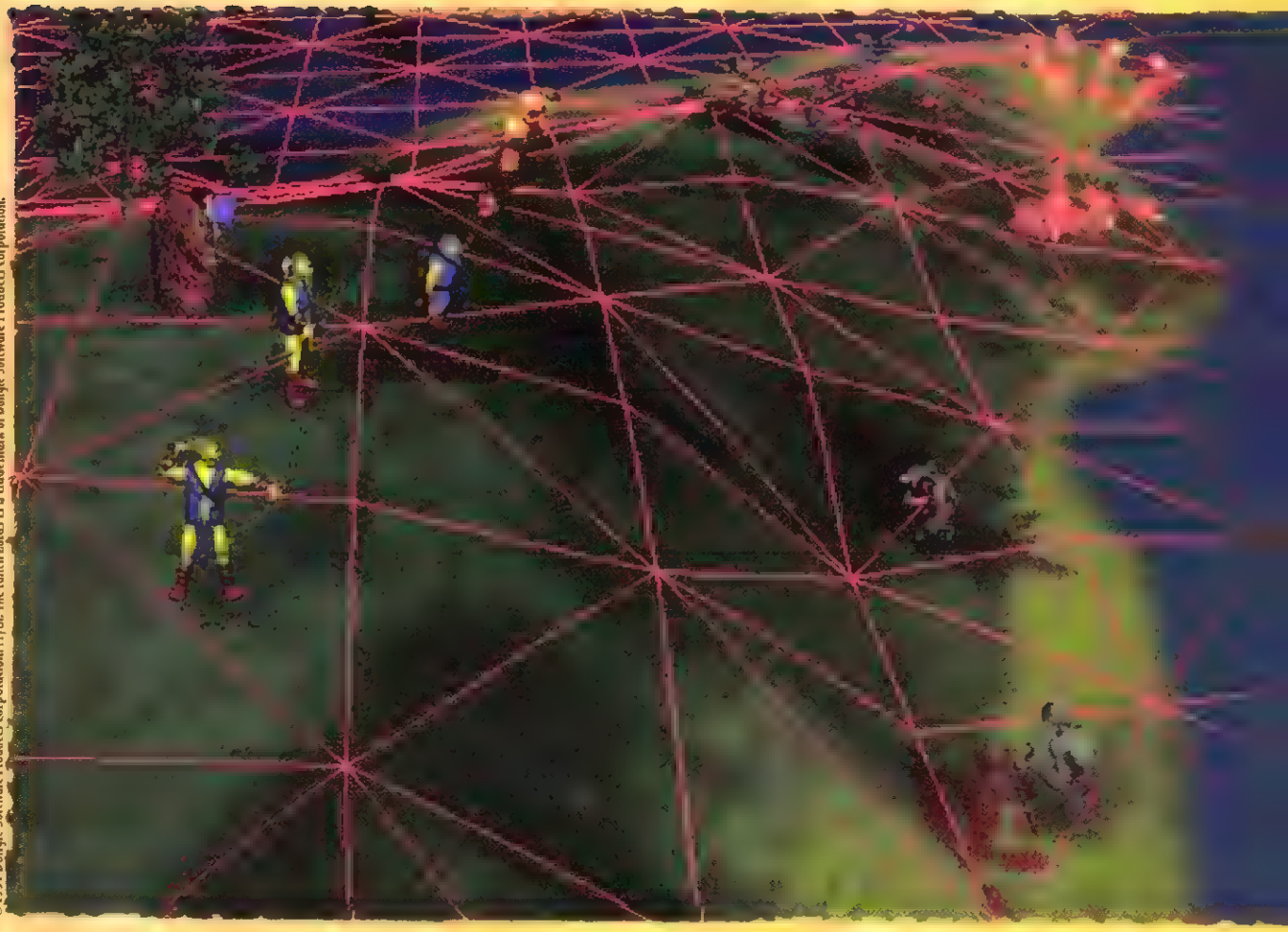
THE NEW BREED

HEAVY GEAR

Product Information Number 92

Myth Sports A 3D Eng
Renders Other Stra



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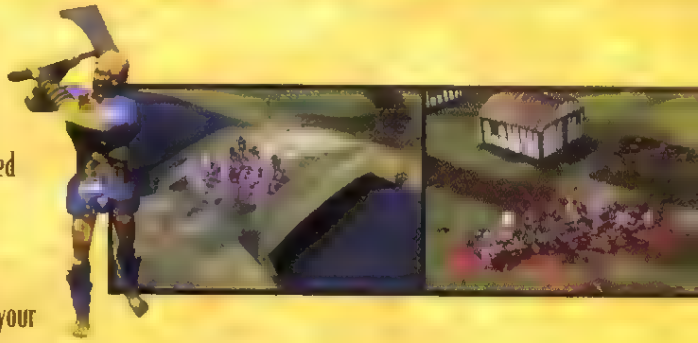

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myth
THE FALLEN LORDS

Product Information Number 104

IN X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER YOU WILL BATTLE HEAD-TO-HEAD AGAINST AN ENEMY MORE RUTHLESS THAN JABBA THE HUTT AND MORE SINISTER THAN DARTH VADER.

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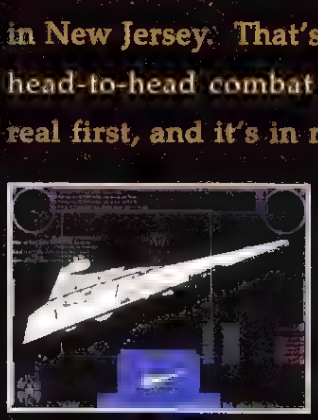
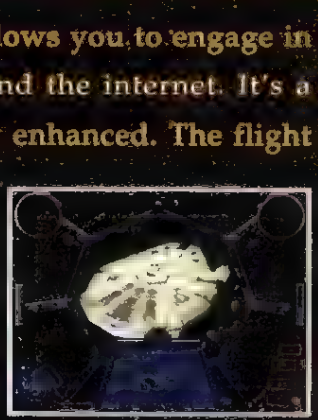
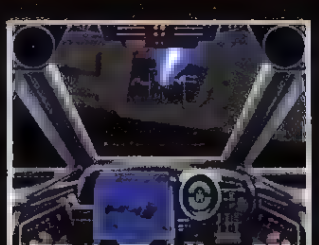




(Floyd from Accounting.)

engine is phenomenal. The new missions are masterstrokes of space mayhem. There are even single player missions for an all-new explosive experience. No wonder *Computer Gaming World* proclaims **X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter** "number one on every space sim-er's wish list." And if you don't believe them, just ask Floyd. http://www.lucasarts.com



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Product Information Number 234

Mascot Near-Misses

It's not easy choosing a mascot. Just as Ronald Reagan very nearly landed the Humphrey Bogart role in *Casablanca* and Tom Selleck almost became Indiana Jones, a handful of aspiring candidates for *PCG* mascot were in the running before we finally settled on Grease Monkey. When we sent out the casting call, our offices were flooded with colorful characters [illegible] But in the end, only one could be the mascot to rule them all. Of course, there can be only one *PCG* mascot, so the others were rejected for various reasons. We promised their agents we'd mention them someday, if there was space, and unfortunately — that time has come. So here's the list of mascots that almost made the cut.

Banana Boy

This contender had the best bit of inside information — his agent knew we were looking for a talking tropical fruit — but he was a bit too green for such an important post. (And, no, he didn't laugh at that, either.)

Grease Monkey

Banking on our love for simians of all kinds, this critter was one of the first in line for an audition. Unfortunately, he didn't get it because he was a mechanic. Good taste prevents us from saying anything more on the subject.

String Bean

[illegible] adorable anthropomorphic vegetable. It was said that a string bean. And a rather limp and moldy one, at that. We're not sure what its agent was thinking — or even how it got an agent.

Third Jawa from the Left

We had to pity this little guy, still trying to live off a bit part he played 20 years ago in *Star Wars*. When we learned he'd been cut out of the movie for the Special Edition, we almost felt sorry enough to make him our mascot — but those glowing red eyes gave the whole staff the willies.

Hairy Otto

This guy was neither little nor cute, but he could lift a 81" monitor over his head which we thought was pretty cool. Sadly, his refusal to wear a shirt made us all sick.

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

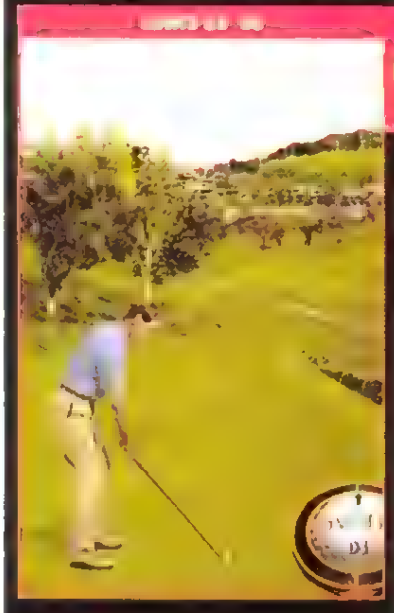
THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

[illegible]

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 85% or above — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.



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p.254

X-COM: Apocalypse

Category: Strategy

Developer: Mythos Games

Publisher: MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030-22454 (800) 695-GAME

Required	We Recommend
Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX4/100; 8MB RAM; SVGA; Mouse	Pentium 120; 16MB RAM; 50MB free hard-drive space

MicroProse gives *X-COM* a new lease on life with high-res graphics and a real-time mode, but a few niggling problems hold it back.

There have been high expectations for the follow-up to *X-COM: UFO Defense*, one of the best turn-based strategy games ever for the PC. After a disappointing sequel, *Terror From the Deep* (which was little more than *X-COM* under water), MicroProse has fired back with all new graphics, a new story line, and some significant changes in gameplay. While *X-COM: Apocalypse* will certainly strike a chord with fans of the original, there are some minor drawbacks that keep it from eclipsing *X-COM* in terms of sheer fun.

For the uninitiated, X-COM stands for Extraterrestrial Combat Unit, a group of futuristic soldiers that you recruit to fight an alien invasion. As the supreme commander of X-COM, you manage your resources (budgets, purchases, research), and wage war on the aliens by commanding your troops in battle.

Previous X-COM games were fought on a global scale. In *Apocalypse*, almost the entire game is focused within MegaPrimus, a futuristic self-contained city under constant attack from aliens.

MegaPrimus is run by a group of corporations that contribute funds to your operation. You have to make sure they're happy if you want to keep the cash flowing in. One way to do that is to shoot down UFOs as they threaten the city. A neat feature lets you watch the battles over the cityscape between your interceptors and the aliens' UFOs. Missed shots will damage buildings, which can seriously tick off the companies that own them, possibly resulting in a decrease in funding.

The other way to deal with the aliens is to take your troops out and face them head-to-head. As in the original, this is the real heart of the game. A successful mission means you bring home more experienced troops and lots of alien items that can be researched to give you new technology and better weapons.

The standard turn-based combat that X-COM veterans love is still here, although the interface for controlling your troops will feel completely — well, alien. The controls have been revamped to include some handy new features: troops can be assigned to any of six squads (six soldiers per squad), and you can now have troops lie prone for stealth and a steadier aim.

Another very interesting feature is the ability to set a soldier's aggression level. You can choose among Safe, Cautious, or Aggressive. Aggressive mode does what you'd expect, causing troops to stand their ground when aliens are coming at them. Safe mode is a more amusing option: when an alien is spotted, you'll see your unit actually run for cover. They're pretty good at finding hiding places, too! It takes a little getting used to, but you'll quickly find ways to use the new options to your advantage.

Gravity has also been added to the X-COM universe. Support structures can be blown away, causing anything they hold up to come crashing down. This occurs in the cityscape as well as during combat missions. It's really satisfying to literally bring the house down on a group of aliens — but they can do the same to you.

The most striking new feature in *Apocalypse* is the ability to play a combat mission in real time. Without the need to worry about how many turns each unit has, your soldiers will fire at will when they spot the enemy. It's a virtual melee, with shots going everywhere. You'll still be able to click on any unit and set specific orders like throwing grenades and using medi kits — you can even pause the combat to set new orders. There's also a control option to group troops into small squads, which is especially handy for getting multiple sol-

That menacing ship sitting in your base is the Annihilator, the baddest mother you can get.

The night view gives the city that eerie X-COM feel, sadly absent in the combat missions.

The New Alien Menace

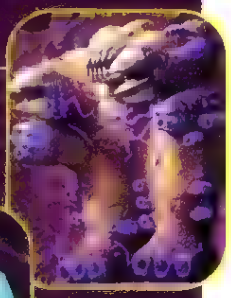
One of the most enjoyable things in any X-COM game is the wild assortment of aliens you encounter. Here's a list of what you're up against in *Apocalypse*:

Overspawn
This is unlike anything you've seen in the X-COM universe. It's the size of a building and leaves a path of destruction like Godzilla on a rampage. Bring out the big guns to deal with this thing.

Anthropod
A humanoid soldier, the Anthropod can use weapons and seems to prefer the Brainsucker Launcher. Because of the potential danger of a Brainsucker, this alien is a high-priority target.

Spitter
One of the first aliens you'll encounter, and one of the least dangerous. Its lack of a head lets it spit a deadly glob through its elongated neck. Eewww.

Multiworm
A thick-skinned creature with an attack similar to the Spitter. Be careful when shooting one dead; they often release a few Hyperworms upon destruction.



Megatron
This bad-ass sports implanted weapon platforms equipped with an energy beam as well as tubes that emit explosive liquids at long range. Get some heavy-duty weapons before taking it on.

Popper
A suicide organism. The popper runs up to its target and explodes, killing itself and doing lots of damage to the surrounding area.

Skeletoid
Another humanoid, the Skeletoid is very intelligent and can use weapons. Fortunately, it's not very strong.

Hyperworm
This tiny bugger has great speed and range. Its spit is deadly. They often gang up and nip a soldier to death.

diers to quickly fire at a specific target

Real-time play is actually a lot of fun, but it's plagued by spotty AI. When left to their own devices, your soldiers don't choose their targets too intelligently. The main drawback seems to be the amount of casualties you'll incur since you're not managing every action of every soldier. On the plus side is the fact that the battles will be over much sooner. It's definitely worth trying both real time and turn based play to see which you prefer. Fortunately, you can choose either mode at the start of every battle, so you're never not married to either option for more than one skirmish.

The game develops along lines that'll be familiar to X-COM vets. You have a base, troops, some basic equipment, and a little cash. From this humble beginning, you must hire new personnel, purchase equipment, improve your base, research new technologies, and build new bases, while fighting one alien intrusion after another.

Research, once again, is the key to winning. It's through research — especially the capture of live aliens — that you gain better weapons and the knowledge of your enemies' vulnerabilities.

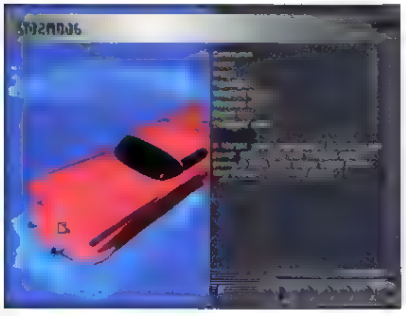
One of the main problems with *Apocalypse* is that it requires you to control too many of the small details. Not only do you have to micromanage everything at each of your bases and keep track of all activities within the cityscape, you also have to keep an eye on how all the corporations are doing. Occasionally, a corporation will become hostile towards you, often because it's under alien control. When this occurs, you have to send out troops to investigate the corporation. Fail to turn up any evidence, and you'll once again risk losing funding.

In *Apocalypse*, the series gets an upgrade to Super VGA graphics. Though this gives the cityscape and building interiors some impressive amounts of detail, the aliens themselves are a letdown. Conspicuously absent are the creepy night missions that gave the original game such an element of suspense. In the original *X-COM*, you occasionally fought under cover of darkness, tensely edging your troops out into the shadows to locate your foe — in *Apocalypse*, each location is brightly lit.

Beyond the addition of a real-time mode — which many X-COM fans will probably forgo (especially in light of the weak AI) — *Apocalypse* doesn't take X-COM to new heights. The graphic facelift is nice, but a lot of the creepiness, style, and ferocity of the original has been homogenized in the move to bright, clean SVGA.

Fortunately, most of the other features that made the original great are still here. The length of the campaign will provide weeks of action, and it still retains the old gotta-play-one-more-mission before-I-quit factor. Fans of turn-based strategy games should find *Apocalypse* very engaging.

Joseph Novicki



Several of the Apocalypse vehicles have a cool 1950s retro style. The art director must be a vintage car buff

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

86%

HIGHS: A highly enjoyable strategy game. All the "first encounters" are as intriguing as ever.

LOWS: Amount of micromanagement borders on the absurd; takes practice to get controls down.

BOTTOM LINE: X-COM fans will enjoy having another go at those menacing aliens.

"The first time an engine moves this fast and is just as detailed at 100 feet as 100,000 feet."
PC Gamer
See for yourself at www.eidosinteractive.com

Product Information Number 138

iF-22

Win95

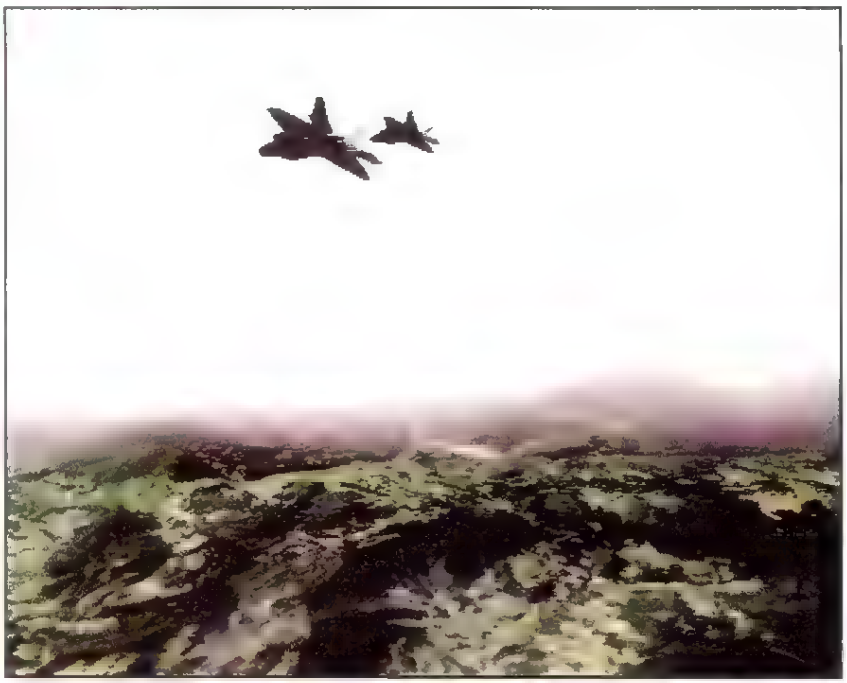
Category: Simulation

Developer: iMagic Labs

Publisher: Interactive Magic, P.O. Box 13491, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 (919) 461-0722

Required	We Recommend
Win95; P90; 4x CD-ROM drive; 16MB RAM; 97MB hard-drive space; 1MB local-bus SVGA; DirectX-compatible sound card	Pentium 166; 8x CD-ROM drive; 32MB RAM; 360MB hard-drive space; Direct3D-compatible 3D accelerator

It's hard not to admire the ambition that went into *iF-22* — but it's impossible to ignore this sim's significant flaws.



Under just the right conditions, *iF-22*'s terrain graphics can look very sharp; most of the time, though, they don't look this good.

When the folks at Interactive Magic set out to create their first in-house military simulation, they went all out, aiming for an all new graphics engine with photorealistic terrain, a dynamic campaign, multiple wingmen, and more. Unfortunately, it looks like they set their sights a little too high.

I really wanted to like this game. It *is* the first serious attempt at a detailed simulation of the Air Force's F-22 Raptor. And *iF-22* certainly seems to have its heart in the right place. Start a campaign, and you're presented right away with some hard-core simulation elements. A campaign overview sets up in detail the geopolitical reasons for the fight you're about to enter; a map displays the current front line; and a report details how many jets are available to your squadron and how soon you'll get replacements and a new shipment of weapons. Shades of *Falcon 3.0*, there.

As in *EF2000*'s dynamic campaign, you're given a list of missions to choose from, randomly generated and based on the current state of the air war. A typical list will include a few air-to-air missions, some strike missions, and one or two escort missions. You pick one, the computer flies the others. In a nod to the Digital Integration sims published by I-Magic — *Apache* and *Hind* — a mission planning screen lets you examine and edit the waypoints that determine your route. A detailed payload screen lets you choose your weapons loadout, giving you information on each weapon's weight and drag and its effect on the stealth characteristics of your jet.

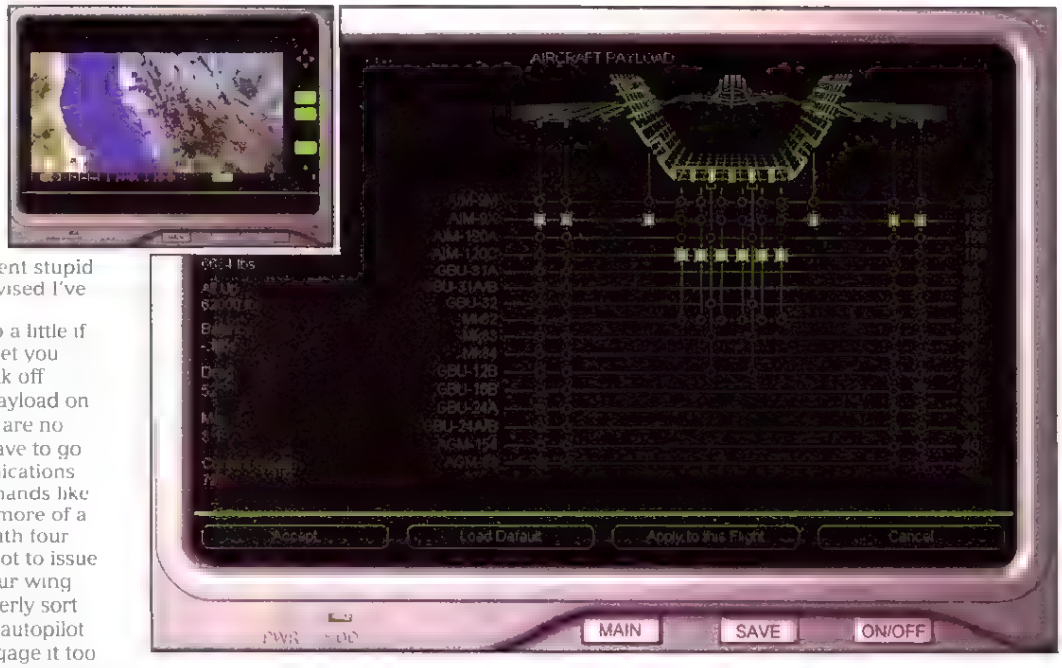
It's all the stuff of a serious simulation. But even in these opening screens, something's not quite right; there's a general lack of production values and user-friendliness. For example, the mission map has only two different levels of zoom, making it very tough to fine-tune your waypoints. And several of the features that made the mission maps in the DI sims so useful — like the ability to rotate the map, bring up multiple information windows, or zoom in to a movable 3D view of the target area — are missing from *iF-22*.

Once the sim itself begins, more problems crop up. Before takeoff, have a look at your surroundings — the airfield's radar dome, hangars, and bunkers — and you'll see some very rough-looking, rudimentary 3D objects. The same goes for your own F-22 and most other objects on the ground or in the air.

Get into combat, and you'll soon run into the limitations of the game's artificial intelligence. You can have as many as three wingmen, but they're not very sharp. For example, let's say you command your wingman to attack a SAM site with his anti-radar missiles; if he's too close to the target, he'll fire anyway, and you'll hear him say "My missile went stupid." Fair enough — that's bound to happen from time to time — but then he'll continue firing at the same target in very rapid succession

Getting Off the Ground

If you've already bought *iF-22* or are considering buying it, you'll want to know about some problems the game has and what Interactive Magic is doing to fix them or help gamers work around them. I-Magic maintains an *iF-22* FAQ (frequently asked questions) file on its web site at *http://www.imagicgames.com/f22.dir/f22faq2.html*. The FAQ includes solutions to incompatibilities with Cyrix processors, CH joysticks, and some video cards (including Matrox boards, the ATI Rage 3D, and S3 ViRGE-based 3D accelerators). It also contains advice for getting the best performance out of *iF-22*, and it'll help you download the latest drivers for your 3D card. Some vital gameplay questions not answered in the manual are also addressed. You can also check out the web site's *iF-22* message board, where you'll find tons of posts from people who've been playing the game.



The detailed Mission Planning and Payload screens are evidence that Interactive Magic's *iF-22* is a more serious sim than previous F-22 games.

until he's out of missiles Over your radio, it sounds something like this. "My mis sile went stupid my missile went stupid my missile went stupid be advised I've gone Winchester."

Very frustrating. It'd help a little if there was a shortcut key that let you quickly tell a wingman to break off before he empties his entire payload on a target he can't hit, but there are no such shortcuts in *iF-22*; you have to go through a multi-level communications menu even for common commands like "Attack My Target." It's even more of a problem when you're faced with four incoming Su-27s and you've got to issue four keystrokes for *each* of your wing men if you want them to properly sort and engage the bandits. Your autopilot isn't terribly smart, either. Engage it too soon after takeoff, and it may just fly you into the side of a mountain. It's designed to land your plane automatically, but it'll occasionally set you down without low ering the landing gear, resulting in a crash. A pretty rotten way to die after flying a perfect mission

Interestingly, you don't need to land in order to complete a mission. In fact, you don't even have to be anywhere near your base. Even deep into enemy terri tory, surrounded by hostile MiGs, with both your engines severely damaged and leaking fuel, you can smack Ctrl-Q to end the mission and get the same rating you'd receive if you'd flown home and landed — never mind the fact that you had only a snowball's chance of making it back alive. And that's not the worst example of how strangely *iF-22* handles victory conditions; I've actually been awarded the Air Medal at the end of a mission in which I crashed on takeoff

These problems may exist because issues of gameplay took a back seat to I-Magic's desire to wow us with state-of-the art terrain graphics. On paper, the game's DEMON1 graphics engine looks pretty terrific; it uses real-world eleva tion data to create accurate 3D models of Bosnia and the Ukraine, then overlays them with satellite photos of the actual areas to create a photorealistic effect. In actual practice, though, it's not worth the trade off

The terrain in *iF-22* does look fan tastic — but only occasionally. Every once in a while, if you're at just the right altitude and you haven't done much maneuvering or used the time compres sion feature for a while, the view outside your F-22 will be very impressive. More often than not, though, it'll be marred by a number of problems

For starters, the resolution of the tex ture maps overlaying the terrain isn't very high, so the illusion deteriorates pretty rapidly as soon as you descend below about 10,000 feet – and the lower you fly, the blockier it gets. In addition, the DEMON1 engine apparently loads low resolution texture maps first, then loads high res textures when it has time. The result is that the terrain below your fighter is usually an uncon vincing patchwork of low-res and high-res textures. It gets worse if you use time compres sion to speed up long transits between waypoints; the render ing engine can't keep up with your plane, so the landscape becomes increasingly blocky

Since the terrain is so complex, it must be read directly from the CD-ROM drive. This means the game fre quently freezes up for a few seconds at a time as new data is loaded. Matters are made worse by the fact that your plane's position continues to be updated even when the on-screen action is at a standstill – when the game starts moving again, you'll frequently find your plane in an unexpected and unwanted position. The only way around this is to set the game for low resolution terrain or sacrifice a few hundred megabytes of hard-drive space to fully install just one of the game's two combat theaters. That's a huge chunk of rea. estate to give up just for acceptable per formance *iF-22* supports 3D accelera tors via Direct3D, but there's only so much a 3D card can do for DEMON1 Bilinear filtering helps smooth out the blocky texture maps, but it does nothing to alleviate the choppiness caused by fre quent disc access

Ultimately, the graphics in *iF 22* aren't as good as those in Nova Logic's or Mission Studios' earlier F-22 games, and yet it may have been an overemphasis on graphics that weak ened every other element of I-Magic's sim. *iF-22* isn't an unmitigated failure – it does have a dynamic campaign and more detail than previous F-22 sims, and its performance is acceptable if you've got a fast Pentium and can spare 400MB or so of hard drive space – but its flaws are considerable. If you're the kind of gamer who buys every new sim that hits the market, go for it; other wise, you'll want to wait until DID releases its *F 22 Air Dominance Fighter* and see which sim suits you best

Dan Bennett

Direct3D support for 3D accelerators helps smooth the blocky graphics, but you'll still see patches of low-res terrain next to high-res, and the "seams" between texture maps become more pronounced.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

65%

HIGHS: First de tailed simulation of F-22 Raptor; dynamic campaign engine.

LOWS: Graphics aren't that great; huge hard-drive and hardware requirements; some significant design flaws.

BOTTOM LINE: The ideas behind it are sound; but lackluster execution keeps it from taking off.

Elements: New

[Centauri Galaxy]

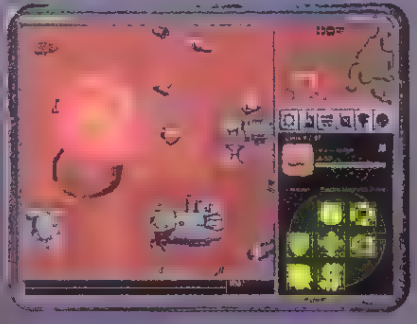
Fe Fear .0092						
Ex Extinction .0149	**Su** Suffocation .002					
Re Rebellion .881	**It** Intellect .999	**Gm** Global Maps .703	**Mp** Multiplayer .1005	**Sv** Survival .703	**Tc** Tactics .0202	**Ad** Adrenal .299
Cm Combat .03	**Sa** Sabotage .011	**Ct** Construction 0.080	**Ev** Evacuation .302	**An** Anxiety .0406	**Cd** Command .105	**S** E Seismic E .505
M Morale .171	**Fi** Fire .199	**Me** Meteor .52	**Vc** Volcano .905	**Wr** Wreckage .408	**Cnf** Confrontation .002	**Ms** Mission .0849

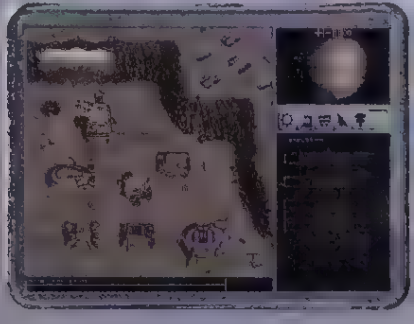
Element of Surprise

Element of Danger

Element of Destruction

Element of Disaster





Dynamix

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Terra>Outpost2

				Sf Science Fiction .371	Tn Testosterone .034	Ae Atmosphere .071
n onists 3	Rt Real-time .011	A Action 0.900	Cp Competition .302	Ds Disaster .0408	Pn Panic .105	Tf Terraforming .0408
gma 2	Me Microbe .119	Ps Psychosis .9054	Fs Fusion .5005	D Danger .0054	Cg Courage .0202	Va Vacuum of space .298
g ger 3	Mi Mining .091	Di Discovery .061	Rs Research .032	Dn Desperation .217	Bc Balance .1003	Dn Day and Night .055
			Cy Conspiracy .111	St Strategy .1005	Tn Technology .071	Ak Attack .0334

Element of Certain Death

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Atomic Bomberman

Win95

Category: Arcade

Developer: Hudson Soft Co., Ltd.

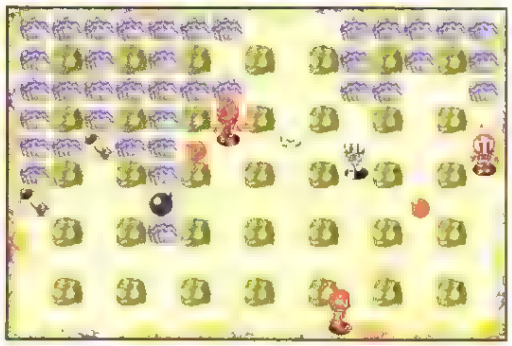
Publisher: Interplay, 16815 Von Karman Ave., Irvine, CA 92606 (800) 969-GAME

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; 40MB free hard-drive space	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 133; 32MB RAM, 525MB free hard-drive space; Supported sound card; Gamepad

This quirky and addictive game with a dedicated console following finally comes to the PC — but at a price.

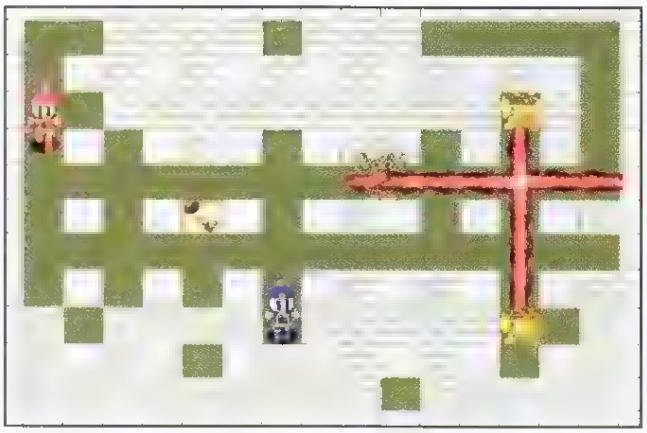
Bomberman mania is something that can't be stopped. Once it takes hold of you and your friends or co-workers, you will be hooked for hours on end, with the cry of "just one more match" heard throughout the evening.

For those of you who haven't caught the *Bomberman* craze from its many console incarnations, the premise of the game is simple: You are represented by a funny looking little "Bomberman" and play on a board filled with walls and special icons. You blow up the walls and your AI or human opponents (or yourself) by dropping bombs. The last one left alive wins. There are different icons that contain special powers; some let you kick or throw bombs; some make you lightning fast; some give you a disease, etc. These random events keep the surprises coming throughout a match. The boards have different themes, including a trash can theme, an ocean theme, and a hockey rink — and they are all butt-ugly, with clashing colors and wall formations that are sometimes confusing. Fortunately, Interplay includes the "Classic Green Acres" level that console players will recognize. With its minimalist color scheme, Classic Green Acres ain't that pretty, but at least it's easy on the eyes.



You can set up team play in the options screen. Looks like the White team is in trouble.

There are variations on the basic theme, including changing the win factor to number of kills instead of just plain survival or playing on teams. The main UI even comes with instructions on how to set up a "Wally Bomb" game (an Interplay office favorite) in which there's a wall in the middle of the board and you hurl bombs over it, like a crazy version of *Battleship*.



The Classic Green Acres board is boring, but at least you won't get a headache from looking at it like you will when you play on other boards.

The techno-punk music and silly sound effects are amusing. Your player will scream out in agony when killed, or say things like "smokin!" or "that's mine!" when you're doing well. The player animations are also cute; when you've trapped yourself with a bomb, your Bomberman will tie a blindfold around his eyes like he's being sent to a firing squad. But, like most arcade games, the music and sound effects get annoying after a couple of hot and heavy sessions (thankfully, you can turn the music off).

The best and biggest improvement in the PC version of *Bomberman* over the console version is Internet multiplay. You can easily set up and play a network game using either an IPX, modem, or serial connection. In our networking tests, we were bombing each other in no time, although the usual problems with Internet play were in evidence — a quick-paced game like *Bomberman* is not much fun played over a slow connection during peak hours. Another improvement over the console version is the ability to have ten players in one game. With ten players in there, *Bomberman* turns in to one hell of a pulse pounding bombfest.

A huge drawback to *Atomic Bomberman* is the amount of space it eats up on your hard drive. The minimum install requires only 40MB, but the medium install wants 178MB and the maximum install needs a whopping 525MB (and, of course, the game runs best from the maximum install). This is simply unacceptable for any game, especially a simple little arcader in which graphics aren't really the point anyway.

One other drawback with *Bomberman* is that there's no opportunity for advancement. The hierarchy system seen in most arcade games, like all time classics such as *Donkey Kong* and *Frogger*, doesn't exist. Some of the levels do seem to have more difficult AI opponents, and some boards have wacky components that make them more difficult, but you don't have to beat one level to move on to the next — you can play any board you want at any time.

Despite these flaws, *Atomic Bomberman* is an enjoyable time killer that will hook you almost as much as *Quake* or *Red Alert*. Anytime you're in the mood for a rockin' bombfest with your buddies, *Bomberman* is the game you should play.

—Lisa H. Renninger

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Fast-paced action; multiplay for up to ten players; entertaining time killer.

LOWS: Takes up way too much hard drive space; no advancement system; ugly playing boards.

BOTTOM LINE: Good clean fun for you and your buddies — if you've got the hard-drive space to spare.

Carmageddon

Category: Racing/Action

Developer: Stainless Software

Publisher: Interplay, 16815 Von Karman Ave., Irvine, CA 92606 (800) 969-GAME

Required	We Recommend
Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; DOS 6.2; 16MB RAM; 20MB hard-drive space	Pentium 200; 32MB RAM; Supported sound card; joystick or driving wheel

Death Race 2000 meets Mad Max in Carmageddon, a game that tempts you with the ultimate in driving satisfaction.

Carmageddon has already developed a loyal following with its many pre-U.S.-release incarnations: There's a UK version, multiple demos, and a startlingly common beta that have made their way around the 'net. There are already editors, patches, dozens of hacks, fan clubs, and a web ring devoted to the game.

But its popularity isn't what make *Carmageddon* a worthy title; what does is its sheer playability. That intangible force is the only thing that can make a rough around the edges, technologically inferior product like this so glutinously addictive.

Carmageddon is an action racing game, and to describe it as ultra-violent would be to do it an injustice. The cold-blooded gore in this game is exaggerated to the point of farce and beyond; it's enough to give Senator Lieberman a coronary. Senator, you thought *Quake* was bad?

Six-car races between contenders in *Death Race 2000*-inspired vehicles take place in a variety of venues, cities, beaches, snowy villages, industrial complexes and deep mines are the back drops for these anarchistic races, and all come complete with plenty of mow downable pedestrians. Running over innocent bystanders is *Carmageddon*'s main selling point, and it's handled with a refreshing lack of taste. Every type of person is represented as chunky sprites screaming and fleeing for dear life: blue collar workers, fat white-collar businessmen, bikini-clad blondes, little old ladies with walkers, gang members, and even cows burst into a mess of red goo upon contact with your bumper.

Pedestrians aren't thrown in just for splatter, they serve a purpose in the game. Plowing through passers by scores you both cash for upgrading your vehicle and valuable extended time bonuses; aside from whacking peds, trashing opponents' vehicles and running over bonus barrels scattered throughout the maps is how you'll accrue extra time to ensure that clock never ticks down to zero. Drivers are not confined to the tracks — in fact, it's worth exploring beyond the marked raceway to find clusters of frightened walkers or bonus barrels containing time, cash, or other power-ups.

By switching to the internal view of *Carmageddon*, you can watch your victims splatter over your windshield.

Multi player gaming is limited to IPX networks, with no sign of modem or Internet play. Thankfully, it's done really well. Similar to *WarCraft II*, one CD can be used by everybody: the game can be installed on as many computers as necessary, but it must be in the server's CD-ROM drive. There are several different variations of multi-player games from all out destruction and vehicle tag to a race to kill more pedestrians than your opponents.

Fresh beef anyone? Cattle are no match for your front bumper.

Carmageddon is to be commended for its no-compromises style and considerable fun factor. But through the glitter is the feel of a game that wasn't finished when it went to market. The graphics engine is pokey and in dire need of an overhaul. The minimum system requirements only allow for chunky VGA graphics, and even that gets choppy on anything slower than a P133. For high resolution, stand back. You absolutely need at least 24MB of RAM, and even with 32MB in a P200 in DOS mode, the frame rate sucked without turning off a lot of the detail. A 3Dfx patch was imminent at press time, but there's no clear word on whether support for Direct3D or any other specific 3D chipset will be offered in the future.

There are other nags, too, that detract from the fun. The physics model is uneven: while the different vehicles handle nicely, they tend to fly high off the road at the smallest bump, a.k.a. *Destruction Derby 2*. The save game feature is annoying, not allowing you to save in the middle of a race. Sometimes, computer controlled cars simply target you rather than make any attempt to run the race, and the game becomes a big demolition derby with pedestrians — it sounds fun, but it can get a little annoying.

A little more time in development could have made *Carmageddon* an all time classic. I had hoped the final U.S. version would address problems both great and small, but these problems remain unchanged. As it stands, the pure sense of fun makes *Carmageddon* a worthy addition to your shelf (provided you enjoy gore), provided you've got a horse of a machine and are willing to live with minor frustrations.

— Joel Durham

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

78%

HIGHS: Guts and gore! Very playable and addictive.

LOWS: An unfinished feel; feeble graphics engine; too many minor nags.

BOTTOM LINE: An incredibly fun game, but rough around the edges and technologically inferior to other action racing games on the market.

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Product Information Number 144

Betrayal in Antara

Win95

Category:	Roleplaying
Developer:	Sierra
Publisher:	Sierra, 3380 146th Place S.E., Suite 300, Bellevue, WA 98007 (800) 757-7707

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX4/100; 16MB RAM; 71MB hard-drive space; Super VGA; Mouse	Pentium 90 or better; Supported sound cards

Modeled almost entirely after *Betrayal at Krondor*, *Antara* proves to be a strong and entertaining roleplaying game.

The hand-drawn artwork of interior locations like inns and shops is quite well done.

When Sierra teamed up with well known author Raymond Feist to create the roleplaying adventure *Betrayal at Krondor* back in 1993, it seemed a match made in heaven. Yet, the combination of a richly textured and familiar roleplaying world created by Feist, and the skillful programming efforts by the Dynamix team was met with lackluster sales at first. After Sierra re-released the game on CD ROM, the title took off, and quickly became one of the most sought after roleplaying games of 1994. Between the initial launch and the surge of sales when the CD-ROM version shipped, however, the agreement between Sierra and Feist broke down, and Feist was released from his contract with Sierra. He sold the license to 7th Level, but relying on the critical acclaim of *Betrayal at Krondor*, Sierra decided to make another game in the same vein.

Betrayal in Antara is just that — a remake of *Krondor* with some updated graphics, some new characters, and a whole new universe to explore. Although the richness of the world doesn't come close to that created by Feist (a project that was 20 years in development, and still evolves through his novels), it's a decent offering, and has quite a bit of depth to it. But Feist had a hand in the production of the story line for *Krondor*, and the lack of a professional's touch is evident in *Antara*, especially in the first few chapters of the game.

If you get close enough to the enemy, you can attempt a surprise attack. Aren is notoriously clumsy, though.

The story starts when William Escobar's ship is attacked while at sea, and he escapes with a stranger named Gregor. They arrive at a beach, where they are attacked by the same thing that sank the ship — a monster that flies through the air and belches fire. Aren Cordelain, a young man from a nearby village, hears the commotion as he's fishing, and rushes to the strangers' aide. The monster sweeps him aside and just before tearing Aren to pieces, Aren somehow releases a magical blast that destroys the creature. William tries to help his partner Gregor, but, severely wounded, Gregor says something about the Consort, presses a strange medallion into William's hand, and dies. The two young men, William and Aren, decide to journey together for the time being — William to uncover the mystery behind the Consort, and Aren to find training for his newfound magical talents.

The party you control (which ranges from two to three characters) is relatively easy to manipulate, although some streamlining of the interface would have been nice. To pick a locked chest, for example, you must go through a tedious mouse-clicking exercise — first you have to right click the chest to see if it's locked. If it is, you have to click a character's portrait to access the lockpicks he may be carrying. Click the lockpicks, then click on the use button, and then you can click the new lockpick icon on the locked chest. It would have been far easier to simply present a menu asking if you wished to pick the lock, and which character would try his or her hand at it.

Two types of player difficulty let you tailor the game to your liking — the experience levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) determine whether or not the computer takes care of character level increases, spell research, skill allocation, and automap annotation. The three difficulty levels (easy, medium, and hard), determine how many enemies you'll face, and the accessibility of items as you travel. The automatic settings can be changed at any time during play, although the difficulty is set only at the beginning of the game.

The combat system is nearly identical to that in *Krondor*, but with a few more options. It's a turn-based affair, where you decide who to attack and how. You can choose from three modes of attack — thrust, swing, and hack — each with its own chance of hitting, and

The overhead map will help you find hidden areas and side passages off the main trail.

each with its own potential for damage. The more damage the move might cause, the less chance it has of succeeding, of course. The turn-based system works well, and is only annoying when the characters are powerful and have to face creatures that pose no threat or danger, since the combatants move rather slowly. However, there is an automated combat system that lets the computer take over for some or all of the character actions. You still have to watch the battle unfold, though.

Magic is a bit different this time — your magic user, Aren, can research new spells based on combining different elements of magic he learns. Aren can learn the various categories of magic from friendly non-player characters (NPCs) encountered during the journey, or he can pick them up from enemy mages when they cast spells at the party during combat. As Aren advances his skills, he can research more and more spells. The different skill levels will let you control his research yourself, or have the computer research spells automatically. It's rather fruitless to research them yourself, however, because it's rare that you'll be able to learn more than two or possibly three spells at a time, and it's difficult to know when a new spell can be researched, which means spell progression is very linear.

Probably the biggest problem with the game is the feeling of repetitiveness. Especially at the outset, you'll spend a lot of time walking down roads, fighting bandits, pirates, Montari, and giant earthworms every quarter-mile or so. This gets pretty old pretty quick, especially when you've gone high enough in levels to hack your way easily through most opposition. As the story progresses, the creatures you fight become more and more challenging, but if you explore everything before going to the next chapter event, you'll usually gain enough experience and power to hold your own.

The chapters begin and end with hand-drawn art and voice-over narration.

Side quests will keep you busy throughout the game. Finishing them gives a feeling of accomplishment, as well as experience, but they get a bit tedious after a while. However, they are well thought out, and amount to more than playing errand boy for a few nobles. But these quests bring out something that really detracts from the immersion in the game world — time. Time does not progress as you make your way through the game. Even if you meet a character that tells you to be at a certain place at a certain time, you'll discover that you can camp for several days, heal your party, and still make the appointment with ease. There's a certain level of tension brought to the game by the sense of impending time — you must get to Ticoro before the Consort passes through, you must cure a boy dying of poison before it's too late, etc. But those tasks still remain no matter how much time you take to accomplish them. On the one hand, it makes the game much easier: you can rest whenever you need to heal, and you can explore the lands at your leisure. However, the lack of time-flow makes the whole adventure feel rather artificial, and makes the tension falls flat in places.

Even with its faults, though, *Betrayal in Antara* is a fun, engrossing fantasy roleplaying game. The world is well conceived, and populated by a fine assortment of NPCs. The high-resolution graphics are beautiful, and colors are vibrant and alive. It's a worthy follow up to *Betrayal at Krondor*, and if you're a fan of the older game, you'll definitely want to play this one.

— Michael Wolf

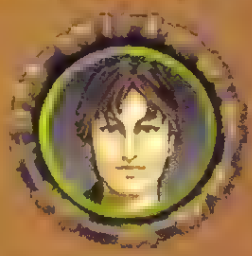
Antara Roll Call

William Escobar

The fourth son of Nathan Escobar, governor of the P... Province. William never worried about an inheritance or titles. His relationship with his father suffers from [illegible] own pride, and the lack of his father to see William as anything but the man he's become. This was not helped when William and one of his brothers came down with the pox — William lived, but his brother did not, and William often feels that his father wishes William had died instead. William maintains an air of [illegible]ity, and his quick wit and [illegible] nature earns him many friends among nobles and commoners alike. Although playful, he has a keen sense of responsibility, and can turn serious at the drop of a hat.

Aren Cordelain

Discovered by an innkeeper and his wife on the doorstep of their inn, Aren never knew his true parents. His work at the inn kept him busy while he was growing up, but [illegible] gave him the chance [illegible] glorious adventures. This [illegible] a longing for adventure, and he soon began collecting stories about journeys that he never thought he'd make. Now that he is 17 years old and just under six [illegible] he makes a good travel [illegible] and Kaelyn on their adventures. [illegible] suited for direct hand-to-hand combat, but his quick mind and earnest nature make it easy for him to make friends wherever he goes.



Kaelyn Usher

Rescued from some over-zealous bandits by Aren and William near the start of the game, Kaelyn soon becomes a natural member of the party. The daughter of a trapper who wanted a boy, Kaelyn is tall, lithe, and deadly with a bow. Raised in the [illegible] mother died giving birth, she keeps that streak of wildness within her. Always one to speak her mind, Kaelyn never backs down, and is as stubborn as she is intelligent. She knows people, and can seemingly see straight through to their true natures. Although certainly not shy, she keeps a sense of decorum about herself, and holds honor and pride above most anything else. She is certainly not one to be trifled with, and once you've earned her friendship, you'll never lose it.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

81%

PROS: Engrossing story line; tried-and-true interface; huge game world.

CONS: Traveling becomes repetitive; interface needs streamlining; lack of a professional writer's touch.

BOTTOM LINE: If you liked *Krondor*, buy this game. It's deep, it's engrossing, and it's fun.

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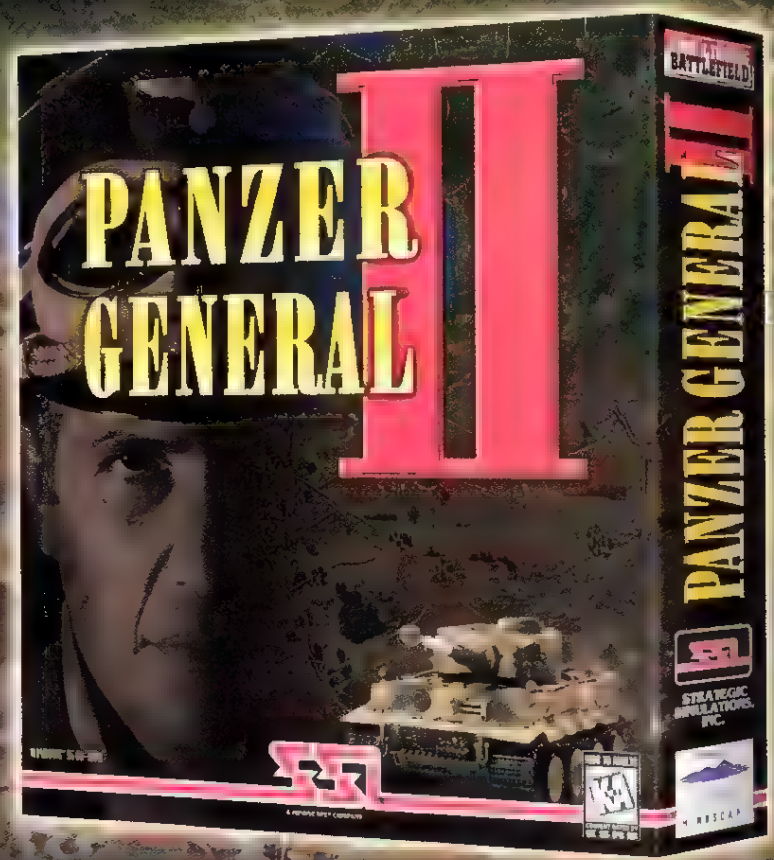

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Product Information Number 324

Twinsen's Odyssey

Category: Adventure

Developer: Adeline

Publisher: Activision, 11601 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1000, Los Angeles, CA 90025 (310) 473-9200

Required	We Recommend:
Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX4/100; 8MB RAM; DOS 6.22 or higher; 35MB hard-drive space; Super VGA graphics	Pentium; 16MB graphics; Supported sound card

The refreshing sequel to the cult hit *Relentless* corners the market on outlandish appeal, but repeats some mistakes of the past.

With a world populated by Elephants, rabbi-bunnies, and freaks like Twinsen, you'd think these hot-dog paratroopers would get along with the inhabitants of Twinsun just fine.

A few years ago, Electronic Arts released *Relentless. Twinsen's Adventure*, an outlandish adventure game created by French developer Adeline Software. Designed by Frederick Raynal (whose credits include the classic *Alone in the Dark*), *Relentless* was an unusual entry into the adventure game market, with its bright, cheerful graphics, a hero that strutted around in a top knot and bedsheet, and utterly bizarre creatures and situations populating an equally bizarre world. Presented in an isometric viewpoint similar that in *D-Generation* or *Crusader: No Regret*, *Relentless* was far from ordinary, mixing equal parts action and adventure, punctuated with cartoonish flair. While *Relentless* was troubled by an unfriendly save feature, awkward controls, and hideous voice acting, it managed to overcome its flaws by providing loads of gameplay and undeniable charm.

After three long years, the star of *Relentless* — Twinsen — is back in a much larger adventure, courtesy of Activision. Improved graphics and massive amounts of gameplay grace the sequel, but many of the flaws that plagued the original return in *Twinsen's Odyssey* and the new game's considerably larger world makes them harder to overlook this time around.

In *Twinsen's Odyssey*, Twinsen must use his talents to confront new dangers that threaten his family, his planet, and his life, as a misguided alien race plots to destroy the planet Twinsun. With his magic ball, the help of his wife, and a few new tricks up his sleeve, Twinsen sets out to spark a revolution on the alien world and defeat its mysterious leader.

The story, such as it is, is revealed as you talk to Twinsun's inhabitants and watch cinematic sequences, but right from the start a few clumsily executed features mar what easily could have been a great adventure. For one, the voice-overs are horribly done, with over the top characterizations and halting deliveries. In some instances, the acting is so overwrought that the dialog is unintelligible. For those who'd rather read along than listen to the poor performances, the dialog is presented as text, but the French-to-English translations can result in some truly baffling exchanges.

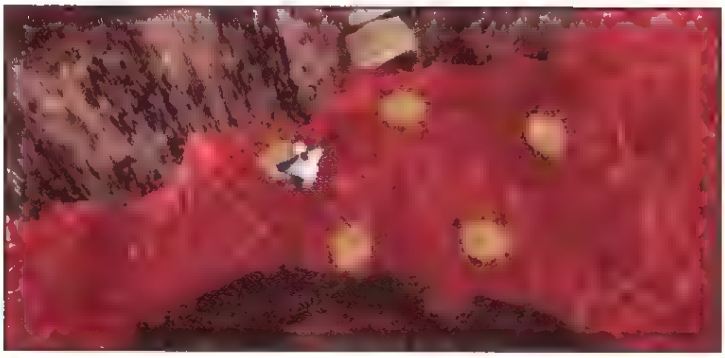
Still, although the story may be less than coherent and a bit juvenile at times — you probably won't notice too often, since you'll be occupied by some amazing new adventures. Where *Relentless* was played entirely from an isometric viewpoint, *Twinsen's Odyssey* sports some sharp new perspectives. Indoor environments are still isometric and a little claustrophobic, but the outdoor scenes take place on expansive 3D rendered landscapes with changing camera views.

The new look shows off the world of Twinsun in much greater detail, although the tricky camera views can prove problematic and disorienting when you're exploring large areas. On Desert Island, for example, you'll need to locate a race track on the far side of the island (Twinsen gets to drive around in the fam-

Rendered cinematics provide nice transitions between locations and help further the story with clever animations.

The four moods of Twinsen return for another round of gaming goodness, but the frustrating control of some of these moods should've been fixed.

When you find a new item, you'll receive a brief description of the item and tips on how to use it. Plus, you'll get to experience some of Twinsen's weird charm as our hero does his happy-dance in celebration of his find.



Movement puzzles prove to be a pain in *Twinsen's Odyssey*, requiring quick changes in mood and a complete mastery of difficult controls.

ily car) — but as you move from scene to scene, you're given a different perspective each time, making it easy to get lost.

The standard isometric perspective isn't always a winner, either. During one particularly difficult movement puzzle in the Dome of the Slate, you'll have to pick your way across a maze of appearing and disappearing black tiles, which float over a black background — and are occasionally obscured by a black column. It's even harder than it sounds.

Control also proves problematic, thanks to the legacy of the original game. As in the previous game, you'll have control over Twinsen's mood, dictating whether he'll fight, run, talk, or sneak around as you explore his surroundings, but the novelty of this aspect has worn a bit thin. There are four moods to choose from: Normal, Sporty, Aggressive, and Discreet. Part of the problem with these modes is that Twinsen responds differently in each mood. For example, in Sporty mode, Twinsen can run and jump, but that's all he can do. Try and talk to characters while in Sporty mode, and all you'll do is jump on their heads. (Fortunately, Twinsen's always in the mood to throw his magic ball.)

In aggressive mode (used for hand-to-hand combat), Twinsen can fight the various enemies he'll encounter by punching and kicking. But in this mode, our hero turns into an uncontrollable jerk, constantly bobbing and weaving, making combat difficult. Adding to the difficulty is the fact that Twinsen turns 45 degrees with each blow he throws, making it extremely difficult to line up on your foe for repeated attacks. Considering the amount of action and quick reflexes the game demands, *Twinsen's Odyssey* virtually cries out for gamepad or joystick control — unfortunately, it's keyboard-only.

On the puzzle side of things, *Twinsen's Odyssey* is a mixed bag. You'll encounter movement puzzles that are either a minor nuisance or genuinely frustrating (jumping to and fro on moving platforms) and fairly standard get object X and give-it-to-person-Y puzzles.

Having said all that, I have to admit *Twinsen's Odyssey* is a rare find, and one that I'd recommend to nearly any adventure gamer (provided, of course, that they recognize the flaws beforehand). This is much more than controlling a character, listening to dialog, or solving a particular puzzle; this is a truly unusual game, with its own intangible charm — enough charm that all the problems that would ordinarily spell a game's doom merely seem trivial.

At its worst, *Twinsen's Odyssey* is a mess of poor dialog, tricky controls, and painful puzzles framed in an incomprehensible and convoluted world. At its best, however, it's an engaging adventure that's good for many hours of gameplay. For most adventure fans hungry for something different, the good will ultimately outweigh the bad, simply because it's so wickedly amusing, wildly stylized, and consistently surprising.

Todd Vaughn

Combat proves to be one of the most troublesome areas in *Twinsen's Odyssey*, thanks to the awkward controls used for Twinsen's movements

The deeper you go, the stranger it gets. Bizarre creatures populate the various worlds, such as these metallic elephants who sound the alarm while Twinsen battles with a missile-launching baddie.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

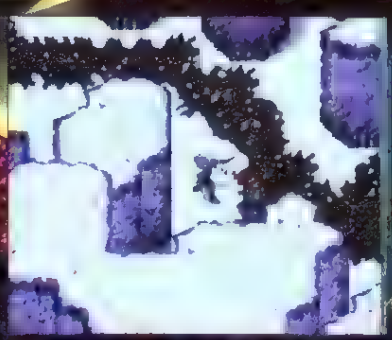
HIGHS: Bizarre environments, characters; massive game world; tasty graphics.

LOWS: Frustrating controls; crummy voice-acting; some difficult puzzles.

BOTTOM LINE: Fans of the original should line up and snag a copy, but newcomers should be aware of the game's flaws.

Revel

Gory Combat Action: Brimming with 170 horrifying enemies and 21 demented spells — each with a unique bloody graphic.



Epic Production: A staggering 100,000+ plus screens and 120 hours of blood-spraying adventure enhanced with 25 grisly minutes of full-motion, 3-D animation.

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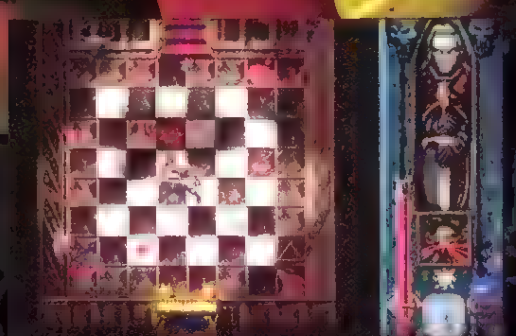

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Product Information Number 84

Extreme Assault

Category: Arcade

Developer: Blue Bye

Publisher: Blue Byte, 33 South Roselle Road, Suite 201, Schaumburg, IL 60193 (847) 534-7950

Required	We Recommend
Pentium 90; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 16MB RAM; 40MB hard-drive space	Pentium 133 or higher; MMX; 110MB hard-drive space; 3Dfx-compatible accelerator

Rip-roaring shooter or just another case of style over content? Frustratingly, Blue Byte's latest game is both.

There's an awful lot to like about Blue Byte's *Extreme Assault*. For a start, it's a 3D shooter that isn't, for once, just another *Quake* clone. This game takes its action to the air, with the player in command of a state-of-the-art attack helicopter and charged with wiping out an invading army of generic bad guys. This may not sound that original on the surface, but think about it — how often do we really see games like this anymore? Ever since *Doom* and *Quake* hijacked the PC action gaming scene, it's rare that we see any testosterone-fuelled gaming that deviates from that norm. So, *Extreme Assault* provides a refreshingly different slant on blasting just when the genre needs it.

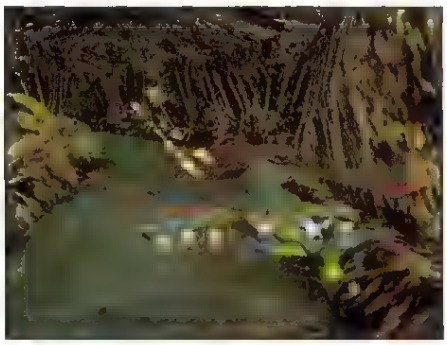
Secondly, it's gorgeous to look at. The game's 3D environments and objects are so gorgeously rendered, colored, and shaded, and the whole thing moves so fluidly, that you'd be forgiven for prying the case from your PC to make sure that Santa hasn't come early this year and installed a 3D accelerator in your system overnight. *Extreme Assault* supports 3Dfx standard accelerator cards, but really, it doesn't need to — the software is smart enough on its own to make your PC jump through flaming hoops in a way you never thought it could.

You'll feel like you're in *Apocalypse Now* as you perform a low-level sweep of this jungle village in search of hostiles to prosecute.

This murky cityscape is just one of the many warzones into which you'll have to take your chopper for some blasting antics.

Thirdly, there's some really good *action* in here. As we've come to expect from games of this ilk, *Extreme Assault* packs one hell of a punch when the going gets hot'n'heavy. With combat zones absolutely littered with targets, even on the early missions of the easy campaign, it's a veritable turkey shoot, with plenty of baddies, both land based and airborne, to blow up — and these baddies, they sure blows up good. This is a chopper game, but don't for a second think this is any kind of simulation — it's no more a sim than, say, *Descent*. Missions are simple, consisting of 90 percent blasting and... well, actually, the other 10 percent is pretty much all blasting, too. For the action freak in search of eye-popping pyrotechics and high body counts, the game delivers in spades.

Unfortunately, *Extreme Assault* isn't everything that action dreams are made of — in fact, it's very far from perfect. Its essential, most damning problem is one of control. This is primarily a function of giving players a chopper to play with — now matter how much you simplify it, it just isn't easy to implement instinctive, arcade-style control on a beast that not only hovers, travels forward and back, up and down, turns left and right and drifts side to side, but has to do all these things, often in complex combinations, in order to survive. The developers did everything they could to make this easy



Later levels are built around a more claustrophobic design, as clear skies are replaced by dark tunnels and underground bases.

The outside views are pretty, but this cockpit screen is the most practical way to do most of the fighting. You can switch off the HUD for added visibility.

on the player, providing three pre-set control configurations and a fully user-definable one, but I just couldn't find one that worked instinctively enough for me. I even tried several experimental configurations of my own, mapping different keys to different joypad buttons in an attempt to get a config that worked for me, but to no avail. There's just a little too much going on here for one joypad and one pair of hands to handle.

This lack of ultra instinctive control isn't usually an issue in most games that use systems this complex. The problem is that most of those games are slower, more methodical simulations where you have time to plan your movements without being constantly bombarded. But *Extreme Assault*'s name is only too apt — you're perpetually under fire from all quarters, and I do mean perpetually. After each mission briefing, you're automatically flown right into the heart of the action, often coming under heavy fire after just a couple of seconds. With sometimes dozens of targets to deal with simultaneously, nothing less than a perfectly instinctive control system will suffice. If you hesitate for so much as a second, or inadvertently fly upwards instead of forwards, or backwards instead of down (common and all too-easy mistakes to make, in my experience), you'll suddenly find that half your shield has been pummelled away by enemy fire or, worse, you're dead.

I doubt that everyone will have as hard a time with this game as I did — if you got to grips with *Descent* with relative ease, you could probably adapt to this without too much difficulty — but I believe that a fast-paced arcade game shouldn't require as much wrestling with the controls as *Extreme Assault* does. It should be immediately instinctive, giving players as wide a margin as possible to react and survive. Any confusion or hesitation caused by the control system cuts drastically into that margin and compromises gameplay severely — and as anyone who's experienced this will tell you, there's nothing more annoying than having to fight the controls when you'd rather be fighting the enemy. I thought it might just be me, all fingers and thumbs, but I've spoken to other gamers who have expressed similar frustrations.

What ticks me off the most is that I really, really wanted to get into this game. It's so gorgeous, and offers so much later in the game — including diverse indoor and underground environments, even a second vehicle in the form of a futuristic tank to control — that the lack of a decent control system that would have allowed me to enjoy all this stuff becomes all the more frustrating. There's a better chance of garnering some fun from the obligatory multi-player mode (up to four players over LAN, Kali, Mplayer, etc.) if only because all the players are equally handicapped.

So, bottom line, a missed opportunity, but one which promises much for Blue Byte's future efforts. This game's 3D graphics really are astounding, as are many of the gameplay ideas on display here. It would be a crime if they weren't utilized again — hopefully in a game which isn't such a beast to control.

- Gary Whitta

The T1 tank is much easier to control than the helicopter — but then, you'll have to master the helicopter before you're allowed to drive the tank.

Early levels task you with rescuing hostages and thwarting enemy convoys from reaching these country villages.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

68%

HIGHS: Incredible graphics; fast action; slick presentation.

LOWS: Complex control mode is a pain to master; steep difficulty curve.

BOTTOM LINE: It looks great, and sometimes plays great, but the fiddly control is too much of an obstacle for the average gamer to overcome.

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one of them
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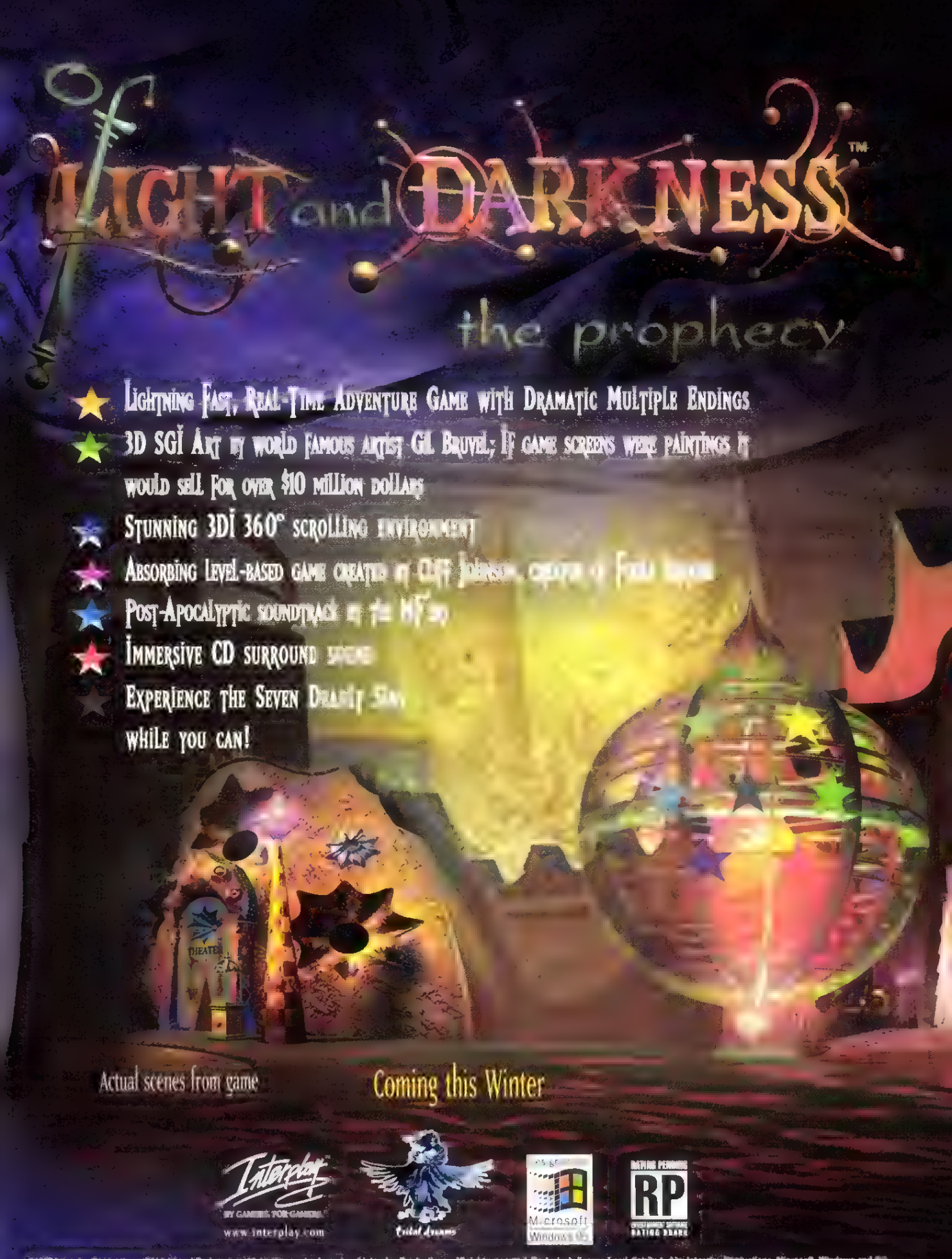
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RP
RATING BOARD

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Scrabble

Category: Strategy

Developer: Random Games, Inc.

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive, 50 Dunham Road, Beverly, MA 01915 (508) 921-3700

Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/66; 8MB RAM; Windows 3.1 or Win 95; 5MB hard-drive space; Mouse	Pentium; Modem and/or Internet access for multi-play

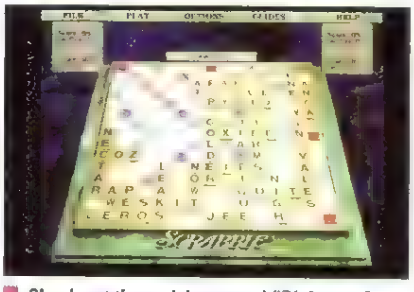
One of the most popular boardgames of all time comes to the PC to challenge the words-herder in all of us.

The 3D perspective board and pieces are very pretty, but you won't believe some of the words the computer comes up with.

Hasbro's been converting a steady stream of its popular boardgames to the PC. Classics such as *Monopoly*, *Battleship*, and *Yahtzee* are already available on CD ROM, and it was only a matter of time before the classic word game *Scrabble* found its way to the PC as well.

Unlike a lot of unlicensed shareware programs and poor quality knock offs that roughly mimic the basic gameplay of *Scrabble*, this game wasn't created by novice programmers or slapped together for a fast buck. *Scrabble* is, for all intents and purposes, an extremely faithful (and possibly superior) version of the original board game. Not only do you get multiple levels of challenging computer players to compete with, but there are also modem, network, and Internet options for playing the toughest opponents of all, real people.

Though *Scrabble* is a relatively simple game to understand and play, there is in-game assistance for any of the rules. There's even a chart that displays the value and number of each letter tile available in the game. The program also contains its own dictionary to help you quickly resolve any challenges. If your opponent claims there's no such word as "XU," a few mouse clicks will show it's a Vietnamese monetary unit.



Check out the activity around "Bioherms." The computer can really pack in some unique word combinations.

When playing in single player mode, that dictionary will come in handy; you can choose from as many as three computer opponents, each with its own skill level. These range from Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert, and Champion. In Champion mode, you can further fine-tune the challenge.

At Novice level, the computer plays very simple words, mostly in the four-letter range (but not *those* four-letter words). In Championship mode, the computer is almost unbeatable, whipping out seven-letter words you've never heard of and maximizing its scoring potential in every turn. After all, it does take full advantage of a very extensive dictionary.

The dictionary used is the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, and it's actually a very lenient one. Not only will the computer use words that even the most well-read gamer may not know, it also allows little, almost non-words like EN (that's the pronunciation of the letter N), or RE (as in DO-RE-MI-FA-SO-LA-TI-DO). This lets the computer squeeze in some pretty incredible combinations — which you can take advantage of yourself, once you've got the hang of it.

Fortunately, a Definitions feature lets you look up look up the meaning of any word that the computer throws you. It's especially handy when your playing on Championship level; with all the new and unusual words you'll come across, the Definitions option can really boost your vocabulary. There's also a Hint option that lists the words you can form by point totals. A Word Lister lets the computer spit out all of the word variations you have with just the current tiles you possess — not in conjunction with anything else on the board. And a Tiles Remaining feature quickly shows all of the letter tiles that have yet to be played.

The rich combination of features, along with the ability to play humans via modem, network, or Internet, make for a very solid *Scrabble* experience. Some of the words played by the computer may have you scratching your head from time to time, but Hasbro hasn't left anything out of this classic game.

Joseph Novicki

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Handy help features; multi-player options; plenty of challenge.

LOWS: Takes some effort to find a suitable difficulty level; some of the boardgame's charm is lost.

BOTTOM LINE: *Scrabble* is best played on a board and not on a PC, but this comes *really* close.

Haunted Casino

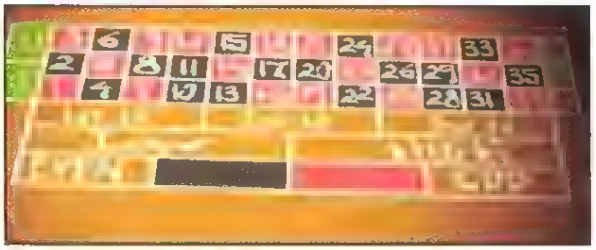
Category: Casino Game

Developer: CrystalVision

Publisher: Micro Star, 2245 Camino Vida Roble, Ste. 100, Carlsbad, CA 92009 (760) 931-4955

Required	We Recommend
4x CD-ROM drive; 486DX/4 100MHz; 4MB RAM; 2MB HD space; SVGA; Sound Blaster or compatible sound card; Mouse	Pentium 133MHz; 6x CD-ROM drive; Local-bus SVGA w/2MB RAM

Replace *The 7th Guest*'s puzzles with some poorly executed games of chance, and you're in the *Haunted Casino*.



You can tell this is a haunted roulette table, because all the numbers are crooked and spooky.

Question: What do you get when you cross two of PC gaming's most needlessly crowded categories — casino collections and video-laden puzzle games? Answer: A confused mess that doesn't succeed in either arena.

The last thing in the world that PC gaming needed was another *Golden Nugget* or *The 7th Guest*, and yet *Haunted Casino* tries to be both — with predictable results, like:

"Click here to enter another dark hall leading to CARIBBEAN STUD."

Oh. My. God.

That's an actual prompt from the game, and it should tell you a lot about *Haunted Casino*. This weird crossbreed is as ill-conceived a game as you'll ever find.

It starts as a sad rip-off of *The 7th Guest*, with a full motion video introduction telling the story of Madam Zuinga's Hotel and Casino, now a haunted ruin (it's unclear if this casino always looked like the Addams family mansion, or if it morphed into a spooky shape when the ghosts moved in). There's something about a young gal finding a mysterious box that contained an even more mysterious object, then a glimpse of a gargoyle's face, and you're off to solve the Mystery of the Haunted Casino.

Of course, nothing you do in this kind of game ever has any connection to solving a mystery. In *The 7th Guest*, you solved a bunch of abstract puzzles and were rewarded with video clips that roughly fit together into a story. In this knock-off, the puzzles are replaced with blackjack, video poker, slots, craps, etc.

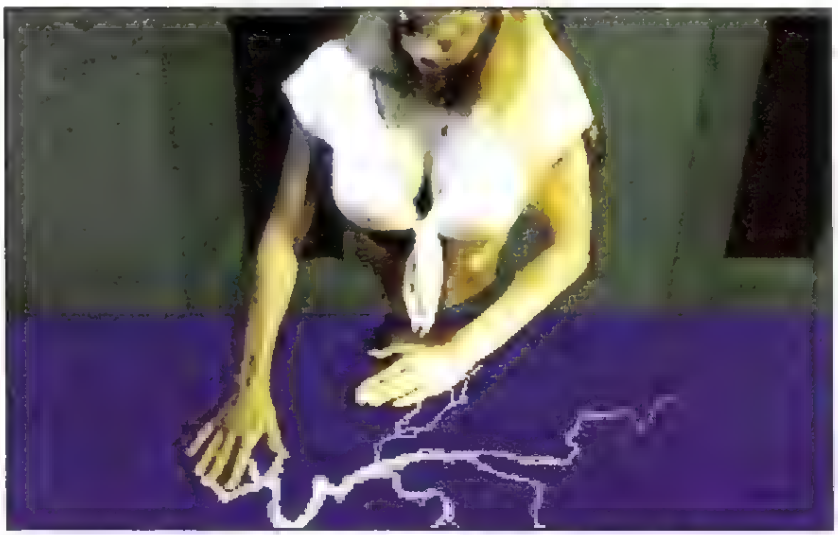
As in *The 7th Guest*, you move along predetermined paths through a dark, pre-rendered manse. Some rooms are off-limits until you've won certain objects in other rooms; for example, you can't get into the Joker Poker room until you've won the key from the spooky Slot Machine. Your ultimate goal is to break the bank by winning $500,000, which earns you the right to play The Machine (a mechanical version of Red Dog) and beat the ghostly Madam Zuinga at her own game — or something like that.

Problem is, you start the game with just $1,000, so you're looking at a *lot* of gambling before you reach the end. Meanwhile, you're treated to some cryptic clips of ghosts materializing and vanishing, then it's off to yet another terrifying game of 5-Card Draw. It's all very reminiscent of the old "SCTV" skit, where a late-night movie host named Count Floyd would pop out of a coffin and yell "Ooooo! Scaaaaary!" Unfortunately, *Haunted Casino* is neither scary nor funny.

There's an Open House option that lets you skip the "adventure" and play any of the games (except Red Dog) at any time. But it's unlikely anyone will want to do that for long; these are some butt ugly casino games, and the interface is about as unfriendly as it could be.

If you're into video-heavy puzzle games, you can do much better than this one, the market is full of these things. And when it comes to gambling games, even *Golden Nugget* beats the tar out of *Haunted Casino*. Give this dog a miss and let Micro Star get back to repackaging shareware and publishing unauthorized add-on packs.

Dan Bennett



Video Poker is dealt by a large-breasted ghost in a tight halter top. She must be one of Madam Zuinga's seven daughters.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

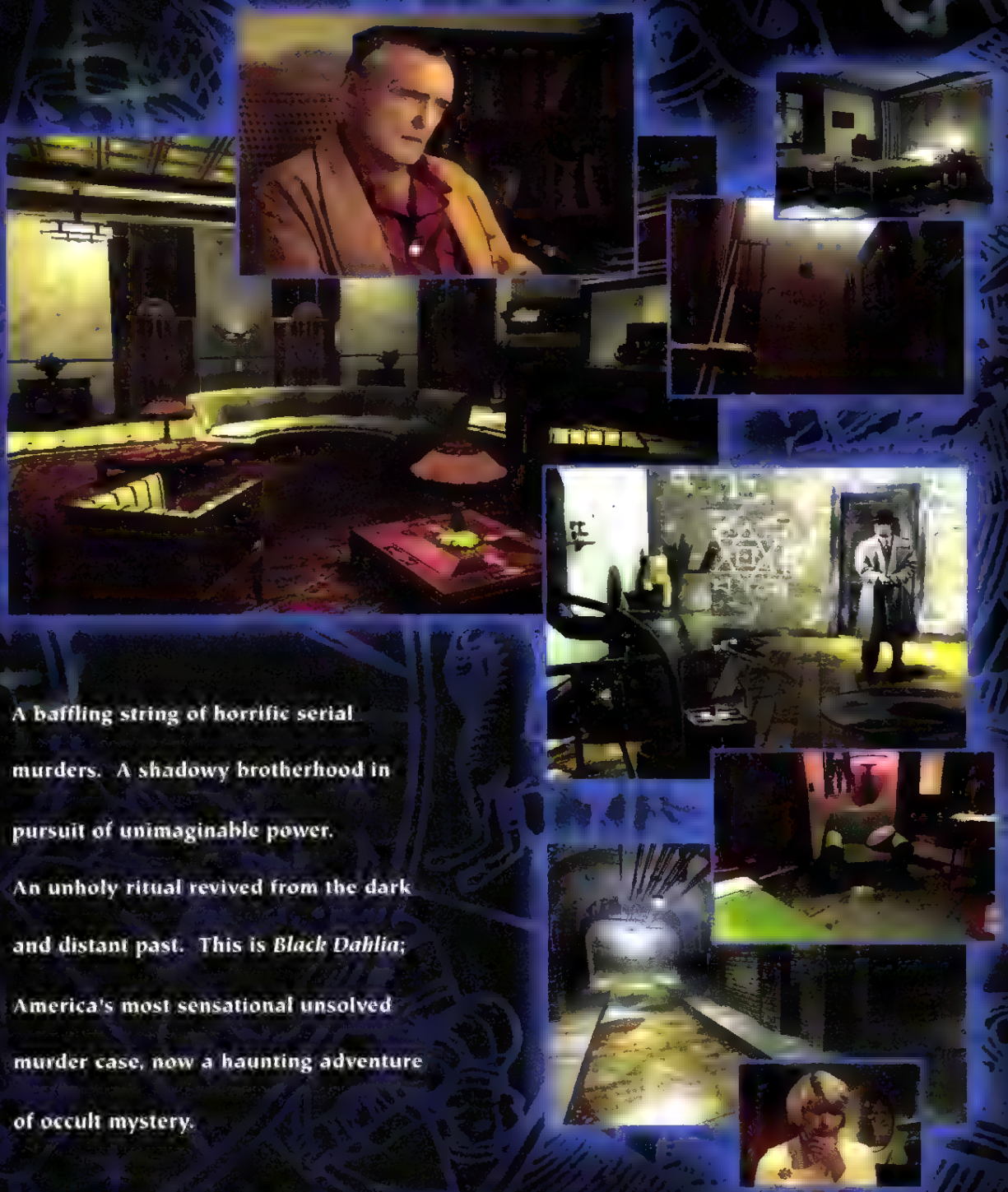
15%

HIGHS: Doesn't take much hard-drive space.

LOWS: Casino games are ugly and poorly designed; adventure game element doesn't work.

BOTTOM LINE: *Haunted Casino* attempts to combine two wildly different game genres and succeeds in making both look bad.

Black
Dahlia



A baffling string of horrific serial murders. A shadowy brotherhood in pursuit of unimaginable power. An unholy ritual revived from the dark and distant past. This is *Black Dahlia*; America's most sensational unsolved murder case, now a haunting adventure of occult mystery.

- *From the creators of Ripper, a superb storyline inspired by actual events.*
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- *A unique interface which immerses you in the ultimate adventure game experience.*
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TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE

www.bdahlia.com

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Warbirds

ONLINE

Category: Online Flight

Developer: ICI

Publisher: iMagic Online, 1701 NW Hwy., Grapevine, TX 76051 (817) 424-5638 *www.imagiconline.com*

Required	We Recommend
486/66DX;16MB RAM; MS-DOS 5.0 or higher; Joystick; 40MB hard-drive space; 9600 baud modem; UNIX dial-up shell	Win95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 2MB SVGA Video; Supported sound card; Throttle; Pedals; 28.8 baud or ISDN modem

It's complicated, it's expensive, it eats new pilots for breakfast, but *Warbirds* is the reigning king of online flight sims.

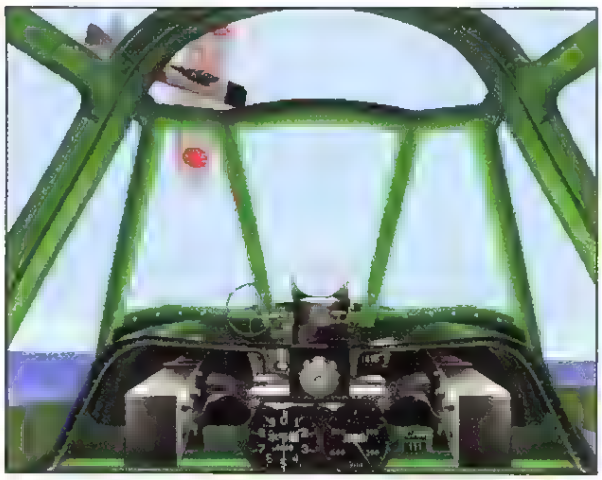
Warbirds has been on the cutting edge of Internet flight sim technology since its beta debut in 1995. iMagic and ICI have never sold a boxed version, preferring to keep an updated downloadable version on their web page at all times. A player can go to the iMagic website, get the latest version, install it on his/her Mac or PC, and fly off-line or head-to-head over the Internet without ever spending a dime. There are no costs associated with playing the game until a player logs into one of the persistent arenas, with hundreds of friends and foes flying together, where there is a two dollar charge per hour of playtime.

The player can choose to fly various World War Two planes, including bombers, fighters, and carrier-based aircraft. Once in the online arena, four "countries" battle it out for supremacy. Each country starts with one main airbase and three outlying airbases, and in addition one country randomly receives a carrier task force. This is when the fun begins.

There are no scripted missions, no rules of engagement, nothing to tell the player "what to do." He or she can choose to fly a bomber against a Purple airbase, fly with a group to engage Gold fighters in their territory, or fly CAP to protect a friendly airbase from attack. It's up to the player each time he or she logs in.

At the outset of a new game, the map is the first thing you should consult — it shows where all of the airfields are located and to which country each field belongs. A player might choose to fly from a lone airfield and search for stray "bogies" — planes from different colored countries. The majority of players spend most of their time in small groups or alone, randomly searching for the odd target to engage. Each of these targets, of course, is another human player.

Dogfighting scattered planes does not produce any lasting effect on the persistent arena. To "win the war," players need to band together and cooperate, choosing an assortment of bombers and support aircraft. Targeting an enemy air base, players flying bombers take out ground targets one-by-one, "closing" the field. At this point, enemy aircraft can no longer take off and any friendly aircraft that safely lands on the tarmac "captures" the field for your country. Carrier groups can be captured as well.



A tight-turning Zero is a deadly opponent even for experienced players.

Once one country has been completely eliminated, the war is over and the arena is reset. Often the game will continue for weeks as the airfields and carriers shift back and forth between countries, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Each pilot is tracked by the server and awarded points based on performance. A player's kill/death ratios, shooting accuracy and bombing results are made publicly available. Players also see a listing of the names of opponents he/she has most recently killed or been killed by. Scores are reset every three weeks.

There are 34 World War Two airplanes from which to choose, each one with its own lovingly drawn and highly detailed cockpit set-up. The Zero's control panel, for example, is in Kanji. One of the intended purposes of the interior artwork is to restrict the player's ability to see outside the cockpit (a real liability in aircraft of the era), reducing his/her situational awareness. The P-51 allows much better visibility than the P-38, for instance, but may not be the aircraft of choice when considering your role in the grand scheme of things.

And it's this sheer scope of the game that makes *Warbirds* different from other online flight sims. Other flight sims limit play to six, eight or 12 planes in any one arena. Warbirds plays with up to 140 players in any one arena. Because of the size of the arena, however, players should expect one-on-one or two-on-two engagements to occur more frequently than massive furballs.

iMagic's voice technology allows

Warbirds 2.0

Shortly after this review goes to press, *Warbirds 2.0* will become available. A major upgrade of the basic engine, it promises to address many of the problems mentioned here. Documentation will be improved, help screens will be continuously available, and graphics will include texture mapped 3D terrain.

Other changes will include air-burst flak, 16-bit color, and an assortment of new aircraft. The interface will be completely handled by point-and-click, eliminating the host of text commands that confused years of *WB1* novices.

As with all new iMagic Online games, *Warbirds 2.0* will first be available in a free Open Beta. After the Open Beta, training flights will be sponsored by iMagic in special arenas with reduced lethality.

While long-time players will welcome the new graphics engine, flak and planes, the real addition is for the new player. Documentation and player access to help is improved immensely. Point and Click will make voice, radio, and just getting out of the cockpit easier.

Carrier-based aircraft, as well as bombers and fighters, are available in *Warbirds*.

The interior detail of the B-17 pilot cabin is highly detailed and lovingly drawn.

players to communicate in real time using microphones and speakers, in addition to typing messages into text buffer. Using voice communications leaves your hands free for joystick and throttle, but due to technical problems, most players still use typed messages on an array of radio frequencies, allowing them to communicate globally, country wide, within their squadron, privately or on a numbered frequency.

The main reason for *Warbirds'* appeal is its unique delay smoothing software. *Warbirds'* latency dampening software allows for smooth combat without the slideshow effect common in other games. Up to 32 planes can appear on the screen at any one time. The software "leads" each of the aircraft slightly, making up for any millisecond interval delays occurring on the 'net.

In a game of this complexity, with more than two years of design evolution behind it, one has to expect a few problems. Given the fact that *Warbirds* exists solely on the Internet, iMagic updates the program every few months. While it is no longer the "user belligerent" game it once was, *Warbirds* is still not a game that can be played "out of the box." A patchwork of text commands and mouse clicks are required.

Due to the numerous iterations of official downloads, not all of the files are compatible with one another, even when a player downloads the "official" version. In my case, when downloading the latest *Warbirds* for this review, the left views refused to work from either the keyboard or joystick. Only by going online and quizzing dedicated fliers over the radio was I able to solve the problem. I needed to add a single keystroke to an .ASC file.

Commands are now documented in a help function but this is not always available to the user. The radio channels alone take numerous trial and error attempts, to say nothing of activating the new voice circuits. Squadron home pages are adorned with FAQs instructing new pilots in the intricacies of *Warbirds*. Nonetheless, the obstacles for a new player are daunting. Even after solving bad files, Internet linkages, and other problems, new players are easy prey for more experienced pilots.

It is highly advisable to find a friendly wingman to coach you through your first few flights. A wingie can volunteer to engage you head-to-head – allowing you to practice without iMagic arena charges — then later introduce you to the main arena. As your name becomes known in the *Warbirds* universe, you may be invited to join one of more than 20 squadrons — perhaps the Flying Pigs ("Oink, oink, to war!") or the Dweebs of Death ("Death before dishonor, often moments before").

Dated graphics continue to be one of the great drawbacks in the *Warbirds* environment. Terrain remains flat and green, with few identifiable landmarks. Trees adorn the land, but are not "solid" — you can fly right through them. Weather is limited to "twilight", "night" and "day." There are no clouds.

On the other hand, these graphics are a boon for users with low powered machines. The minimum system for *Warbirds* is a 486/60 with 16MB of RAM, but it's recommended that you play with something quite a bit faster. Only a few dedicated pilots can achieve kills without Pentium based computers.

Warbirds is more vulnerable to "net storms" than other games. Likewise, voice communications are useless under any but the most ideal conditions. If spikes and delays in the 'net get truly bad, no amount of "latency smoothing" can stop enemy planes from magically moving from one side of the screen to the other.

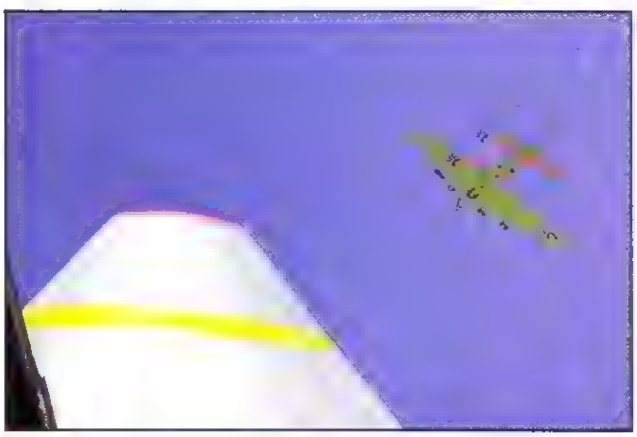
A final factor to consider is cost. In interviewing several long-time *Warbirds* players, the question of monthly cost arose. These players, admittedly some of the most serious gamers in the *Warbirds* arena, reported spending between $50 and $150 a month in online access charges. These pilots get very, very good at what they do, and a new player should be forewarned.

iMagic Online says it's working to overcome the game's difficulties. *Warbirds 2.0* (see sidebar) will have full online and onscreen help functions. In addition, *Fighter Ops* — a kinder version of *Warbirds* — will soon be available online at a much reduced cost.

Competition for *Warbirds'* preeminent spot will intensify in the coming months. Microsoft's *Fighter Aces*, with completely new code written in St Petersburg, Russia, will debut this fall with a similar capacity to handle hundreds of online pilots at once. Kesmai's *Air Warrior* remains one of the oldest, best supported games in this, and Eidos still plans on releasing an online flight sim, *Confirmed Kill*, with TEN, but no date is currently being discussed.

Despite numerous problems *Warbirds* is in a class by itself. It's as close to a VR combat experience as you are likely to get with current technology. If you want to fly in a fast paced environment against aggressive human opponents, this is the game for you.

-Edwin Steussey



Not many pilots can lay claim to shooting down B-17s. In *Warbirds*, as in real life, they are tough to beat.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

78%

HIGHS: Top 'net technology; human opponents; realistic flight-modeling; 100 plus player arenas.

LOWS: Poor graphics; lack of official documentation; high cost; tough online competitors.

BOTTOM LINE: Highly recommended to serious flight sim fans with time and money to spare.

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RATING PENDING
RP
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Product Information Number 304

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Links LS 1998 Edition

Win95

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

There's still no question about it: *Links* is the greatest golf game around, and it keeps getting better.

Category:	Sports
Developer:	Access
Publisher:	Access, 4750 Wiley Post Way, Bldg 1, Ste 200, Salt Lake City, UT, 84116-2878 (800) 800 4880

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; 45MB hard-drive space; 1MB video card; Mouse	Pentium 133; 32MB RAM; 100MB hard-drive space; Supported sound card; 2MB VRAM Super VGA

Links LS 1998 Edition begs the question: How much can a great game keep improving until it has nowhere left to go?

With computer games, it's tough to say. There is always room for them to run smoother, look better, and have more features. But at the moment, *Links LS 98* is the best-looking, best-playing, most full-featured golf game available, and it is probable that it will only be topped by the next Links.

Links LS 97 was a generational leap forward over *Links 386 Pro*. By contrast, *Links LS 98* is a smaller step, but an improvement nonetheless. The biggest difference, love or it or hate it, is that it is now a native Windows 95 only product. This has allowed Access to better integrate some of the new features. It does render a bit faster, though having lots of cameras open still drags speed down. New water reflections and shading add to the visual realism, and the color depth seems a bit richer. As with other Windows 95 golf games, however, there's an occasional hitch in some swings

New graphic embellishments are immediately noticeable At any moment a balloon, blimp, or airplane might fly by on the horizon. These tend to repeat, but it's good to see some ambient animation. Golfer, pin, and landing zone cameras (with forward and reverse angles) are added, though the ball cam of PGA Tour is still missed The views are now "true" windows, so you can tile cameras around your main view instead of overlapping it. The final welcome addition is that no matter what angle you are viewing from, all the golfers are visible standing around the active golfer. This gives online games a real immediacy

Arnie stares at some trees and worries about sciatica while you putt out.

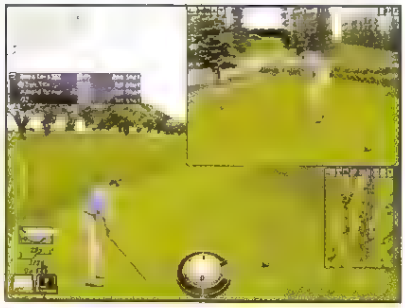
As for those online games, they are now smoothly implemented over native TCP/IP, and work like a charm for up to eight players. Mplayer hosts games, and the installation even adds an icon for the Windows IP finder utility. Larger, full blown tournaments featuring dozens of players over several days are enabled via an off-line tournament mode that ranks players and tracks scores. To round it all off, two new scoring modes, Scramble and Alternate Shot, have been added

Not everyone is finding bliss in the Windows 95 only *Links*. Several incompatibilities, resulting in crashes or cropped screens, have cropped up on some video chips, such as the S3 or the Screamin' 3D. The S3 set has always been a headache for some developers, and its DirectX drivers have been lacking. A download of new drivers can usually correct these problems, but Access is aware of them and intends to address them. Some small bugs have also been reported in terms of club selection during off-line tournaments, as well as some hangs when playing with AI golfers. I encountered none of these bugs.

All the other features of the original game have been carried forward: four courses (three at Kapalua and one at Latrobe), Arnold Palmer, course and clubhouse tours, video clips, customizable cameras, and the standard Links interface. While it's certainly not a generational leap forward, it's a good improvement and, with an upgrade rebate for *Links LS 97* owners, well worth checking out. There's still plenty of kick left in this engine, and it could carry Access for a couple more years while it develops the next generation of cutting edge golf simulations

T. Liam McDonald

Few computer games look this good: ***Links LS 98*** renders Kapalua Bay in stunning detail.



Golfing partners are now visible on the course while you play in tournaments online or against the computer.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

95%

HIGHS: Incredible visuals; stable internet play; plenty of features and courses.

LOWS: Some reports of bugs and video card problems; club selection quirks in off-line tourneys.

BOTTOM LINE: A small step forward for the best of golf sims, but a step forward nonetheless.

Pro-Pinball: Timeshock!

Win95

Category: Arcade

Developer: Another Cunning Development

Publisher: Empire, 16th Flr., 580 California St., San Francisco, CA 94104 (415) 439-4854

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 8MB RAM; Super VGA; 20MB hard-disk space	Pentium 166; 16MB RAM; Supported sound card

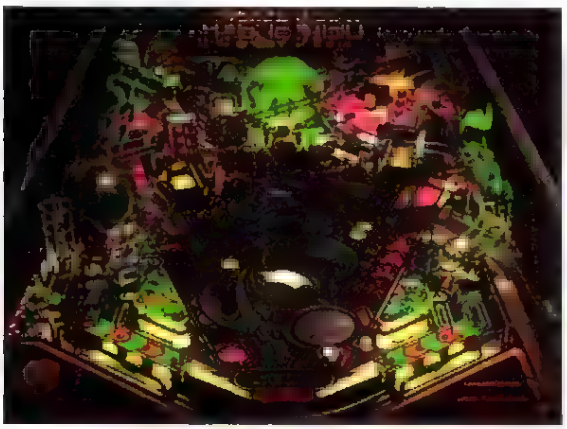
The latest silver ball simulation from Empire Interactive resurrects a favorite pastime with an excellent blend of realism and challenge.

Let's face it. There's only so much you can expect to do with a pinball game on the PC. You can't break the glass, tip the machine over, or even kick it, unless of course you're in the market for a new PC. Over the years 21st Century has dominated the pinball scene with a flood of excellent titles, but none of that seems to have deterred Empire Interactive. *Pro Pinball- Timeshock!* is the company's second release in the Pro-Pinball series, and with this version, Empire has set out to create the most realistic arcade pinball simulation ever to come to the PC.

Like its predecessor, *The Web*, *Timeshock!* relies heavily on detail to deliver an immensely realistic representation of the game of pinball. The impression is one of looking through your monitor onto a pinball machine, right down to the instructions written on the glass top. The attention to detail strikes you almost immediately. The flashing lights are nearly as annoying as they are on a real pinball machine. The bumper shakes and the flipper animations are all 3D rendered and are timed perfectly. Springs depress when the ball rolls over them. Even the scoreboard has that flashy dot matrix quality that is synonymous with modern day pinball machines.

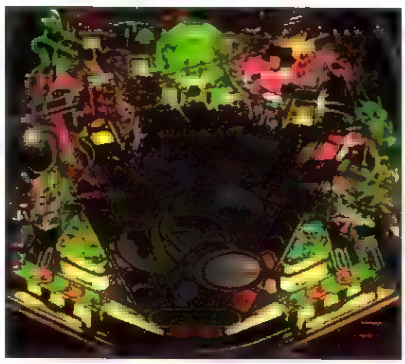
Perhaps the most stunning level of detail in the game lies in the Operator's Menu. With *Timeshock!*, you can go "inside" the machine, and tweak the system parameters to create your own version of the game. There are more than 150 changes you can make, covering everything from the number of balls a player gets in a game to the number of tilt warnings issued. You can also use the Operator's Menu to do the more mundane tasks of pinball machine upkeep, just in case you get that urge to activate all the lights to see if the filaments are working.

Pro-Pinball Timeshock! sports a tremendous array of technology as well. Seamlessly integrating 2D sprites and 3D rendered components, *Timeshock!* provides fluid and fast gameplay. The music, along with some amazingly realistic sound effects, are presented in Dolby Surround Sound. The screen can be maximized to 1600 x 1200, and supports up to 16 million colors. *Timeshock!* also supports a tried and true form of multi-player support: taking turns. Up to four people can compete against each other. Alas, there is no support for Internet play, but Empire does keep a bragging rights high score bulletin board on its web site.



The lights are so realistic, you'll swear you're looking at a real pinball machine back at your high school hangout.

The table design is excellent, borrowing elements from modern pinball machines with multiple flippers, ramps, tunnels, bumper traps, etc. and is garnished with a time traveling theme. It turns out that in the future, an experiment with a Time Crystal has gone terribly awry. As a result, a wave of anti-time is hurtling back through the space-time continuum, and if it gets to the origin of time, well, we're all history. Thankfully, your pinball machine is actually a time machine. With it, you'll have to travel through time, pick up some crystal fragments, and create an anti anti-time device to stop that wave before the cosmos collapses in on itself.



Get three balls in the crane, and you'll get a special surprise.

During the game, getting the ball into the hole below the center crystal initiates the time machine and takes you either into the past or the future. When you've arrived, say at ancient Rome, you'll need to stay alive long enough to collect the crystal fragments and move onto another location. In those locations, you can also hit a combination that initiates a little mini game. These mini games take place in the dot matrix window, and are, not surprisingly, exceptionally simple. How complex can you be when all you've got to work with are the flipper controls?

When you get right down to it, *Timeshock!* is as fun a pinball game as you're going to get on the PC. It's easy to play, and it's got all the features you could hope for in a pinball sim, even if the tilt feature isn't very satisfying (at least until somebody develops force-feedback monitors and keyboards). Besides, when was the last you got to save Earth from total annihilation by using your multi-ball power-up?

—*Damon Dean*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

82%

HIGHS: Great ball physics, superb realism, great table design.

LOWS: Only one table. Gets repetitive in a hurry.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got that itch to play some pinball, but can't get to the pub, this is the next best thing.

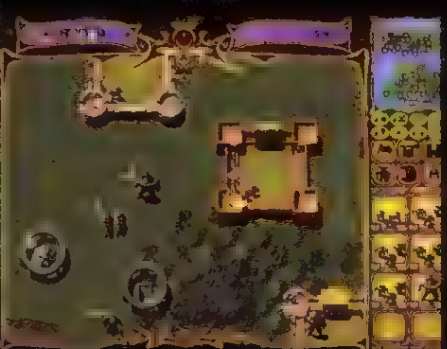
ZOMBIES MAKE GREAT
STEPPING STONES.
REDORB

"Warlords AI not only blows away the immediate fantasy-based competition, but other strategic wargames as well." –PC Games

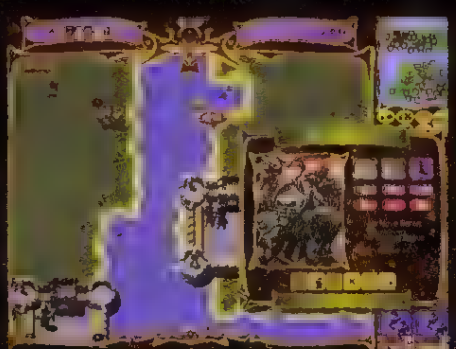
"For this gaming series, third times a charm!" –PC Gamer

Warlords III
Reign of Heroes

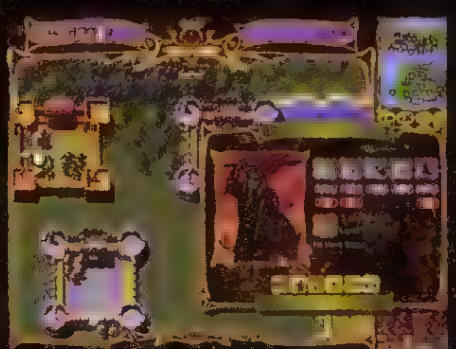
"Warlords III pushes the envelope forward for turn-based games – especially for internet play." –Computer Gaming World



Unique simultaneous movement mode for up to 8 players in multiplayer games reveals each player's actions in real time.



Test your strategies with more than 80 different animated creatures and warriors, plus countless spells, abilities and rewards over multiple terrains.



Struggle against computer opponents whose AI monitors your every tendency and plots elaborate strategies against you and your allies.

Hordes of the Undead overrun the Selentine Empire, leaving utter devastation in their wake. From the ashes, a powerful new reign of heroes arises to contend for power and build a new empire. Arrayed against zombies, elementals and other unspeakables, you must arrange alliances, cast horrific spells, and lead your armies to victory... or be crushed beneath the enemy's merciless heel.

www.warlords3.com

Product Information Number 108

Meat Puppet

Win95

Category:	Action/Adventure
Developer:	Kronos
Publisher:	Playmates Interactive Ent., 611 Anton Blvd. Suite 500, Costa Mesa, CA (714) 428-2112

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 100; 16MB RAM; DirectX Compatible Video Card w/ 2MB Video RAM; Mouse	Pentium 133; 32MB RAM, Supported sound card

A gun-toting female protagonist with an attitude takes on mutants, industrialists, and a corrupt society in this inadequate shooter.

You get the feeling the folks at Playmates Interactive might be in serious need of some counseling? First they release *MDK* (which many believe is short for Murder Death Kill), and now here comes *Meat Puppet*, a stylishly violent isometric shooter that borders on the tasteless. At least their themes are consistent: death, mayhem, and destruction. With *MDK*, Playmates delivered a slick interface, innovative game design, and great character animation. With *Meat Puppet*...well, at least there's great character animation.

In *Meat Puppet*, you are Lotos Abstraction, a female assassin working against your will for a man known only as Martinet. You spend most of your time being pissed off at the world, and creating mayhem for the industrialists of the future. Not surprisingly, the future is a pretty bleak place. These wealthy industrialists have fashioned their companies after the embassies of the 20th century. They are fortresses, hiding the secrets of advanced technologies, and defended by mindless minions. The industrialists have taken on the roles of ambassadors, military leaders and twisted scientists. In short, they're bad.

Your boss, Martinet, is no sweetheart either. He swiped you from a cocktail party and turned you into something that looks like a twisted combination of Milla Jovovich from *The Fifth Element* and Bozo the Clown. Your computer partner, Dumaine, was once human, but now, only laments the fact that he can't remember who he once was. Smiles everyone, smiles!

With this rather apocalyptic future as the backdrop, your goal is to find Martinet and exact a little revenge for turning you into a killing machine with pumps. But first, you've got to take care of one last hit. From the very first mission, you can tell that *Meat Puppet* is going to be different. Like *Crusader: No Regret* and *Twinsen's Odyssey*, *Meat Puppet* employs an isometric view of the world. 3D characters are meshed with pre-rendered 2D backgrounds. The camera scrolls horizontally across the world as the character moves from room to room.

Nothing like the smell of burning flesh to get you going in the morning!

The most impressive part of *Meat Puppet* is its style. The artists at Kronos deserve credit for delivering a disturbing and gothic future that is exceptionally detailed. The game's music, a sweet blend of ambient and industrial themes, is eerily perfect. The worlds are all very dark, with a number of deco features. Character movements are realistic, if a bit exaggerated, creating an "Aeon Flux"-like effect. A number of the characters have ambient affects as well. For example, if you try to make Lotos jump to an area where she can't, she'll throw up her hands and let out a sigh. But without a doubt, violence is the main attraction in *Meat Puppet*. Watching the Whipkeepers or the big-headed baby Brigadeers burst into flames from a rocket impact is a thing of beauty. Of course, the downside to having such immense detail in the characters is that they are small compared to other isometric games. As a result, you may find yourself inching ever closer to the screen to watch them move.

The whips will drain you of energy. Perhaps the tunnels would be a better route.

What's for dinner? You, if you're not careful with these guys.

The biggest problem with *Meat Puppet*, however, is the lack of player control over Lotos. This is pretty much the kiss of death for an action game. You can use either the keyboard or the mouse to control Lotos, but you'll find that getting Lotos to go exactly where you'd like her to is nearly impossible. Bumping into walls and getting stuck in hallways are commonplace, even after hours with the game. Aiming is a chore (expect to waste a lot of ammunition at the beginning) and seemingly simple tasks such as jumping and flips are so frustrating as to be worthless pursuits. Oh, by the way, forget about running and shooting at the same time. You can't do it.

Another disappointment with *Meat Puppet* is the lack of a decent puzzle structure. You spend an inordinate amount of time walking around in circles looking for the right pathway. Clues from Dumaine or the info kiosks inside buildings are few and far between. Once you've eliminated the mindless drones that abound on every single level, you'll find yourself wondering what to do next. This is particularly annoying given that your missions are timed. As it turns out, Lotos can't live for more than 15 minutes without the Martinet's colonic signal.

If you can overlook the infuriating controls and bizarre time restrictions, *Meat Puppet* does get more interesting the farther you get into it, if you're into bleak industrial wastelands. The levels are deep (over 300 locations) and resource management plays a significant factor in whether you live or die. You'll need to adapt your character by finding new weapons and armor in order to stay alive. However, these improvements in story and design are not matched by the changes in enemy artificial intelligence or gameplay.

The underdeveloped AI in *Meat Puppet* is all too noticeable. It's almost as if the programmers ran out of time to do the AI, so the level designers compensated by simply throwing in more dumb characters. By the time you're done with a series of locations with the same enemies, you'll be sick of hearing the same catch phrases ("Subdue the intruder!" was the worst) while watching these drones walk into walls, sculptures and anything else that happens to be in the way.

They're tiny and annoying, but they've got machetes, and they swarm. Consider yourself warned.

It's also worth noting that *Meat Puppet* turned out to be pretty buggy. The game would freeze up every five or ten minutes on one PC, and crashed on install with three separate PCs. All in all, it's a pretty good indication that several patches are forthcoming for this game.

Lotus may look great, but controlling her movements within the game is a chore.

There's no doubt that this game had a chance to redefine and rejuvenate the isometric action/adventure genre. *Meat Puppet* delivers the goods on style, but that achievement is marred by poor game and interface design combined with a rash of engineering mishaps. As attractive as Lotos and the game may look, be warned that you may be setting yourself up for a headache that's simply not worth it.

Damon Dean

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Impressive character animation. Great music and sound effects.

LOWS: Controls are awful and make playing the game a chore. Puzzles are annoying. AI is baffling.

BOTTOM LINE: Watch "Aeon Flux" instead. You get great animation without carpal tunnel syndrome.

45%

DEATH is NOTHING

Play as one of 4 death-dealing Mageslayers across dozens of hellish levels.

Soul-destroying 3-D environments heaving with diabolical traps and mysteries.

An all-powerful war chest of magical attacks like Chain Lightning and the Firewhip.

Spread the Evil with several modes of MultiSlayer action for up to 16 players.

Death would be too easy.

Too little to repay a thousand year old debt.

Too quick to satisfy the hunger of time you betrayed and left to the ravages of the Mages in another millennium.

Before **LORE THANE** extracts his terrible price on your body and **SOUL**, you are bound to wander through five worlds of atrocity.

Stoking your **powers**. Solving internal mysteries. Gathering **magic** and **arcane** knowledge.

Fighting your way through **FEAR** into **MADNESS** for one last, desperate struggle against **Evil**, himself.

Only then will he **anoint you** with the last sacraments of your torment.

No. **Death** would be too easy.

A malevolent 3D fantasy quest from the creators of HEXEN and HEXEN II

Windows 95

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GT Interactive Software

Product Information Number 151

WITHOUT TORMENT.
MAGELAYER

Warlords III

Win95

Category:	Strategy
Developer:	Strategic Studies Group
Publisher:	Broderbund/Red Orb, P.O. Box 6121, Novato, CA 94948 (415) 382-4400

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 75; 16MB RAM; Mouse	Pentium 133; Supported sound card

The latest installment of the Warlords legacy does justice to its forebears, but newbies may be baffled by its simplistic strategy approach.

Okay, so the game maps could be considered a bit bland, but the uncluttered look helps you put together the overall strategic picture.

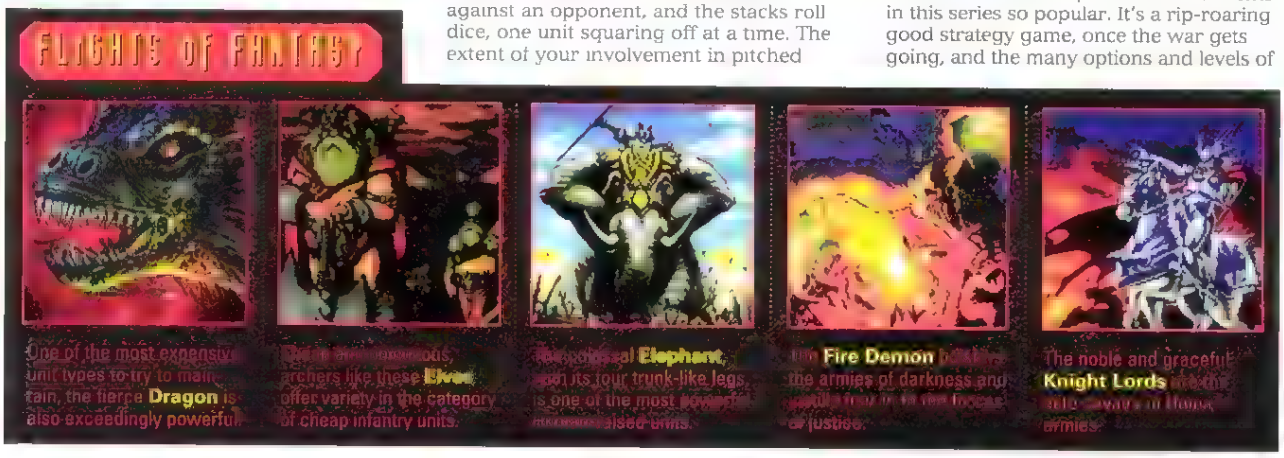
Turn-based strategy games are probably the most sophisticated and demanding type of computer games. They have the abstract strategic challenge of a game like chess, but roughed out with variegated terrain, evolving units, multiple opponents, and the random factor — the throw of the dice — that makes intuition nearly as important as logic. Take all those elements and wrap it in a quasi-Tolkien swords and sorcery milieu and you have *Warlords III*, the latest in SSG's long-running series.

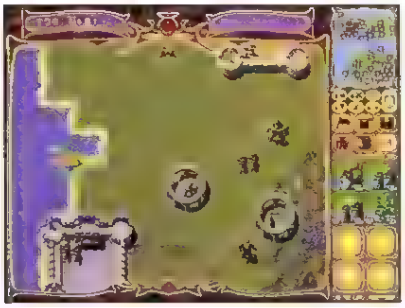
Like previous games in the series, *Warlords III* takes a simplified approach when addressing its strategic game. It doesn't have the immediacy of an *X-COM*, the rich variety of a *Heroes of Might & Magic*, or the complex economics and scientific development of a *Civilization*. Diplomacy, tactical combat, economics and adventuring are all pretty thin, completely secondary to the strategic game.

Adventuring consists of moving a hero into a ruin and rolling dice to see if he dies or comes away with a treasure. Diplomacy is limited to bribery. Economics involves only holding cities, which generate income with which to pay your troops or improve city defenses. A random merchant or mercenary might pop up to offer you an advantage, for cash.

Tactical combat is non-interactive. You move a stack (a number of units) against an opponent, and the stacks roll dice, one unit squaring off at a time. The extent of your involvement in pitched battles is the pre-combat ordering of stacks, and making sure you have a hero with some magical powers to tilt the odds in your favor.

So it's the strategic game that is the heart of *Warlords III*, and it involves mainly the raising, positioning, and movement of armies. And this is where *Warlords III* becomes quite enjoyable, and it's what's made the previous installments in this series so popular. It's a rip-roaring good strategy game, once the war gets going, and the many options and levels of


FLIGHTS OF FANTASY
One of the most expensive unit types to try to maintain, the fierce Dragon is also exceedingly powerful.
Elven archers like these offer variety in the category of cheap infantry units.
The mythical Elephant, with its four trunk-like legs, is one of the most powerful [illegible] units.
The Fire Demon [illegible] the armies of darkness and [illegible] the forces of justice.
The noble and graceful Knight Lords [illegible] armies.



An excellent strategic game is at the heart of *Warlords III*.

Tactical combat puts you into observer mode. You'd think at least you could set up combat formations, as seen in *Caesar II*. But this is all single-file, one-at-a-time combat.

artificial intelligence make for a varied and enduring gaming experience

Essentially you expand out from your core, seize cities and try to restrict access to your interior cities, because you're vectoring all new troops out of there and onto the frontier. The vectoring feature is nice, allowing you to automatically route newly produced units from interior cities to jumping-off points on your periphery.

Yet the strategic apparatus is somewhat undermined because enemy armies can blithely bypass your frontier fortifications and wander into your heartland unopposed. That's partly the fault of a turn based game with high unit movement rates, and could've easily been avoided by an opportunity fire/interrupt option. This is particularly problematic in the case of rivers, where any group of imbeciles can float upstream, disembark on a bridge, and wreak havoc deep within your homeland. That in itself is fine — historically that was the whole Vikings plan — but if you have a castle on a bridge blocking the river, well, it ought to block the river.

But the biggest problem with *Warlords III* may be its lack of immediacy. The world is somewhat bland and you never feel personally engaged. Troops are devoid of morale, and you can draft army after army from your cities without impacting its population, health, or loyalty. It's a rarefied, abstract world of strategy, but that's not what fantasy is all about. Fantasy warfare is the Battle of Five Armies at the roots of Lonely Mountain, or the Riders of Rohan mustering to the horn of Theoden. Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war.

On the upside, the new multi-player options are welcome, and will probably thrill the hard-core *Warlords II* players. Up to eight can play on a LAN or on Mplayer; four over TCP/IP. Modem and e-mail games are also supported; a nice touch.

There are twelve scenarios and one campaign, as well as a random scenario generator (with solid custom options). Random scenarios are a must, but a full blown scenario editor would have been even better. Red Orb will be posting free scenarios to registered users on its web page, but it would have been nice to be able to make your own.

So what's the final verdict? *Warlords III* is excellent for what it is — abstract, turn-based strategy. Though I mostly dwelt on where the game could have been better, keep in mind that this is overall a good game. I certainly prefer it to 90 percent of what else is out there, and it will stay on my hard drive after this review is done. Because ultimately, in this era of multimedia miasma, me-too real-time strategy games, and a slew of unthinking action games, *Warlords III* cuts through the hype and clutter and delivers solid and reliable gameplay above all else.

— Jason Bates

"I do not believe it! Victory — within your grasp?" This Crypt Keeper-esque character makes amusing comments in the game's one token nod towards multimedia fluff.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

85%

HIGHS: Stable program; lovely art; solid AI and scenarios; new TCP/IP and IPX support.

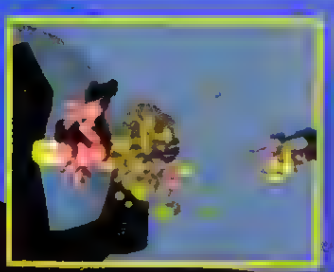
LOWS: Little customizability; middling maps; no economics or tactical combat; lack of charisma.

BOTTOM LINE: Demanding and interesting, *Warlords III* offers a no-frills, focused challenge.

Scud

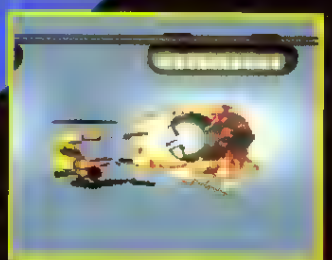
INDUSTRIAL EVOLUTION™

Disposable, like a diaper. But he doesn't take any crap.



Multiple Missions pit Scud against a bizarre collection of villains and enemy Scuds.

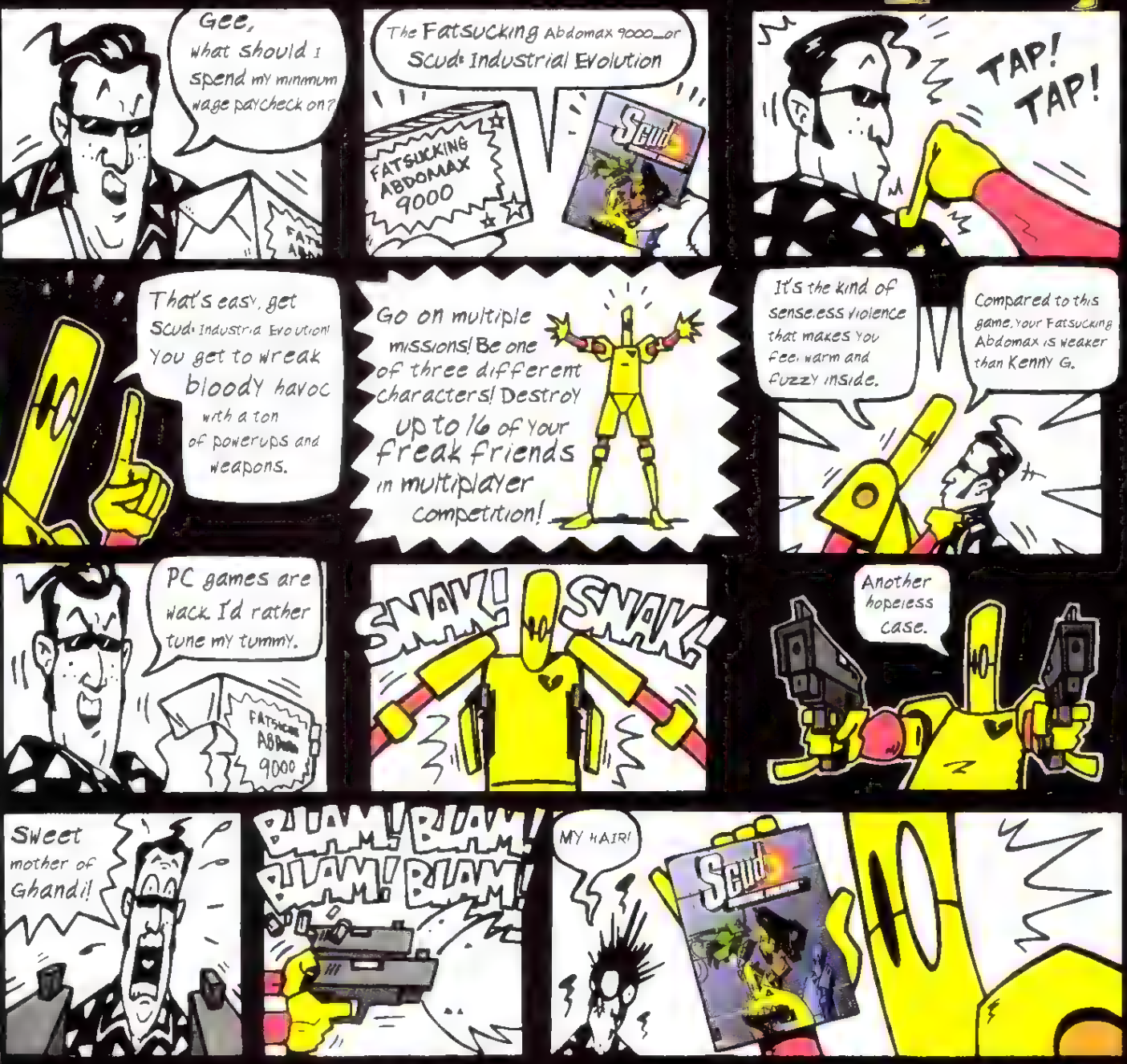
Obliterate up to 16 opponents over LAN or HEAT.NET.



Top down view and easy to master controls keep action fast and furious.

www.scud.com

Scud is the coolest robot assassin to ever be dispensed from a vending machine. He's programmed to self destruct, but intent on sticking around quite a bit longer. He's a coin operated killer hellbent on customer satisfaction, but there's always one sick, twisted freak who won't listen to reason.


Gee, what should I spend my minimum wage paycheck on?
The Fatsucking Abdomax 9000 or Scud: Industrial Evolution
FATSUCKING ABDOMAX 9000
Scud
TAP! TAP!
That's easy, get Scud: Industrial Evolution! You get to wreak bloody havoc with a ton of powerups and weapons.
Go on multiple missions! Be one of three different characters! Destroy up to 16 of your freak friends in multiplayer competition!
It's the kind of senseless violence that makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside.
Compared to this game, your Fatsucking Abdomax is weaker than Kenny G.
PC games are wack. I'd rather tune my tummy.
SNAK! SNAK!
Another hopeless case.
Sweet mother of Ghandi!
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
MY HAIR!
Scud

"Illustration by Edvis"

• Tons of powerups! • Multiple Weapons!
• Single player, multiplayer, or compete on HEAT.NET!

COMPETE ON HEAT
HEAT.NET

Includes 3 months free premium membership on HEAT.NET

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RP

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Product Information Number 323

Just a few words from
the *original creators*
of Mechwarrior™
for the PC...

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...prepare yourself.

EarthSiege³: Future Wars
The battle begins this Christmas.

See your local retailer for pre-order information.
And visit the *EarthSiege³* web page for a glimpse at what awaits you: including video clips, screenshots, audio files, behind the scenes materials and the chance to sign up as an exclusive Software Beta Tester.

www.sierra.com/EarthSiege3

Dynamix

The Space Bar

Win95

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category:	Adventure
Developer:	Boffo Games
Publisher:	SegaSoft, 150 Shoreline Drive, Redwood City, CA 94065 (888) 734-2763

Required	We Recommend
Win95; 4x CD-ROM drive; Pentium 75; 16MB RAM minimum; 50MB free hard-drive space; Super VGA graphics; Mouse	Pentium 100; 32MB RAM; Supported sound card

Infocom legend Steve Meretzky returns to the adventure game scene with a quirky space-age tale.

A lot of people have been saying the adventure game is dead. I was among them, buried as I was in *Myst* clones and "games" that were little more than non-interactive slide shows. Recently, however, there are signs that the genre is returning to the classic gameplay of (dare I say it) text adventures!

At one time, the only "graphics" sported by the best adventure games were the ones that gamers created in their heads. Nowadays, 3D rendered SVGA graphics and surround sound allow us to visualize fantastic worlds in ways that were impossible a few years ago. The cost of this, however, has been games that sacrificed rich interaction with the fictional world for the sake of a collection of pretty pictures and point-and-click pixel hunts. That's what makes Steve Meretzky's *The Space Bar* such a breath of fresh air.

Meretzky, the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and several of Infocom's classic text adventures, has managed to take the best of this new style of adventure gaming and marry it to the best features of the old text adventures. *The Space Bar* includes fascinating aliens, a well-drawn and animated setting, clever and frequently hilarious dialog, difficult puzzles, and a marvelous sense of interactivity. It's the kind of combination that fans of the genre haven't seen in a long time.

You play Alias Node, a human being on the dismal backwater mining planet of Armpit IV. You're a company detective working for Amalgamated Vacuum. One day while sitting in your patrol car scarfing down jelly donuts with your partner Maksh, a fellow officer tells you about a recent break-in at corporate headquarters. She took out one of the criminals, but the other one managed to flee to a local bar/spaceport called the Thirsty Tentacle.

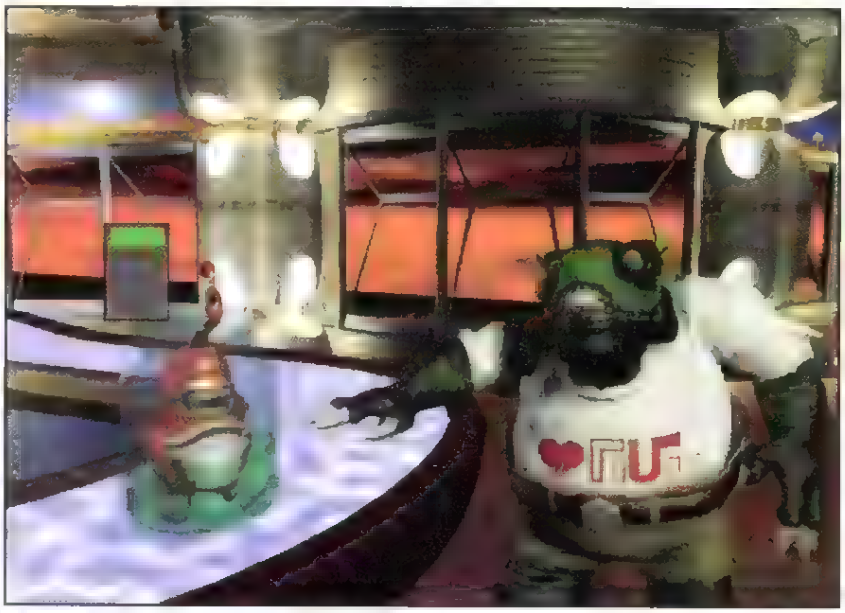
Great, now you've got to go under cover to track down a desperate criminal. The problem is, you don't know who or what you're looking for. Even worse, the criminal is a shape-shifter who can be anyone or anything in the bar. Fortunately, you do have one advantage: you've been trained in an interrogation technique called "Empathy Telepathy."

Empathy telepathy is one of the most unique characteristics of *The Space Bar*. Your discussions with various patrons in The Thirsty Tentacle will frequently trigger powerful memories. Alias can enter these memories and relive them through the eyes of the alien. Essentially a mini-adventure game within the larger story line, each of these recovered memories can (if properly solved) provide Alias with a clue that will help him figure out the larger mystery of the shape shifter's identity.

It is these mini-adventures that really make the game stand out. Viewing the world through the eyes of the various aliens you'll meet presents an enormous challenge. The best way to solve the puzzles in these flashbacks is to actually begin to think like the alien you're playing. For example, one alien, a smart mouthed orange toad named Fleebix, has no arms and lives inside a glass jar. Since Fleebix can't move or pick up anything himself, most of his adventure consists of trying to figure out the proper sequence of commands to give to Thud, Fleebix's huge reptile companion. Thud has the approximate intelligence of a damp sponge, so you need to be very specific with him. A far more innovative adventure has you inside the head of a creature with no eyes that "sees" by radar. Your task is to mix together explosives with ingredients that are identified by "sounds" such as "crackle-crackle-hiss-pop."

The Space Bar uses an interface similar to the "Z vision" 360-degree pan found in *Zork: Nemesis*. The actual view of the world takes up about two thirds of the screen. The remainder is taken up by a Personal Digital Assistant that acts as an inventory screen, message log, data analyzer, and (with its sarcastic female personality module) surrogate partner. A symbol in the lower left hand of the screen tells you what species you currently inhabit, a blessing when you restore a game and have forgotten where (or what) you are.

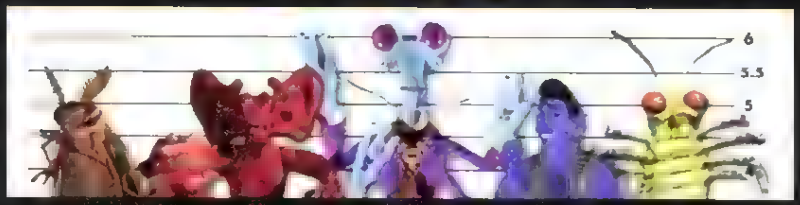
The interface however, goes a step further than most adventure games. Clicking on an area doesn't just bring up the standard "Take," "Talk to," and "Use." Each area you click on has its own unique set of responses, choices



Fleebix and Thud, the original Odd Couple. Thes two are so funny, they should have their own TV show.

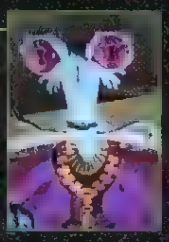
The Unusual Suspects

One of the most fun aspects of *The Space Bar* is the unusual assortment of aliens you get to meet. The creatures were designed by Ron Cobb, whose design credits include the Alien movies, *The Abyss*, *The Last Starfighter*, and *Conan the Barbarian*, but he's most famous for designing the aliens in the cantina scene in *Star Wars*. Here's a rundown on some of Cobb's most colorful creations:



Fleebix
Sure, he's a foul-mouthed sea monkey living in a glass jar, but if you can help this neblitz remember which starship he's supposed to get on, he'll give you a vital clue.

Sraffan
Like all of his race, he's got more wealth than he knows what to do with. Help him buy a planet though, and he just might give you a vital piece of evidence.



Soldier 714-Z-387
A Zzazzl who's been exiled from his homeland carrying his queen's egg. Entering his head will give you a whole new outlook on life.

Thud
Teeth of T-Rex, heart of a lion, brain of a snow pea. Thud's destiny is to do pretty much what Fleebix tells him (assuming he understands it).

Seedrot
A vedj, a sentient plant who's not fond of animals. Ordering the Caesar salad right now would be a really bad thing!

Maksh
Your partner and best friend. The only alien on Armpit IV that doesn't think you look like Jerry Lewis. Maksh is kidnapped, trapped in a room filled with explosives, and needs your help.

such as "Smell," "Smack," "Order around," and a variety of conversational options. All of these options allow for an extraordinarily complex interaction with the game world. This allows the puzzles to be very complex and very different from the run of mill "Click everywhere with everything in my inventory" type

Overall, most of the voices are very good. Of special note are the actors who play Fleebix and Thud. Frankly, these guys deserve their own Saturday morning cartoon. They're that funny. On the other hand, some of the voices came off a bit flat, especially the police captain whose cheesy line reading made me cringe every time. The aliens, designed by Ron Cobb, the man who designed the cantina scene in *Star Wars*, are good, if a bit simplistic. Most of them seem to be designed around a gimmick, i.e. "Let's make a giant fly" or "Let's make an alien with big ears"

A word of warning, however, for impatient gamers. *The Space Bar* is hard. Many of the puzzles require a lot of trial and error, since it isn't always clear exactly what you have to do. Some of the mini-adventures, such as buying a planet when in the head of the Sraffan, are actually complex enough to be games on their own. As in any adventure game, save early and save often. The extra effort, however, is worth it for the enormous payoff. The story line is rich and complex, full of great characters, hilarious dialog, and a genuine sense of drama usually lacking in modern adventure games.

The one major annoyance in the game is the enormous amount of time spent switching discs. The manual claims that this is because the game is very non-linear, so entering a new area means you'll have to replace the CD. That may be true, but while playing the game, I seemed to get interrupted by the irritating command to switch CDs every five minutes. If there was ever a game that cried out for a DVD version, this is the one.

That shouldn't stop die-hard adventure gamers from picking up *The Space Bar*, though. The game is fresh, funny, and well constructed from both a technical and gameplay aspect. If, like me, you miss the days when intricately constructed adventure games were the rule rather than the exception, you owe it to yourself to visit *The Space Bar*. Be careful, though. You may be there for a long, long time.

Allen Rausch

Your Empathy Telepathy has just kicked in. Somewhere in this memory is the clue you'll need to solve the mystery.

The aliens were designed by the same man who did the cantina creatures in *Star Wars*.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

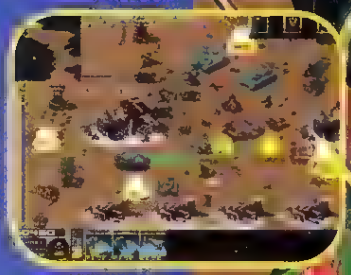
90%

HIGHS: Hilarious dialog; engaging story. Good puzzles. Excellent interface.

LOWS: Frequent CD swapping. Some of the voice acting is poor. Some difficult puzzles.

BOTTOM LINE: A return to the older style of adventure gaming, reminiscent of Infocom at its best.

A GOOD *7TH LEGION* RECRUIT



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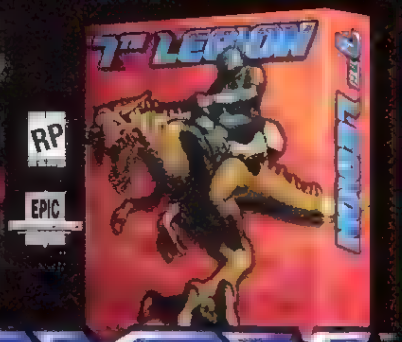

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Product Information Number 233

Decisive Battles of WWII: The Ardennes Offensive

Win95

Why keep refighting a hopeless battle? Because you may just be able to change history in this little gem from SSG.

Category:	Wargame
Developer:	Strategic Simulations Group
Publisher:	S.S.I., 675 Almanor Ave, St. 201 Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901 (800) 601-7529

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 8MB RAM; 20MB hard-drive space; Mouse	Pentium 100; 12MB RAM; Supported sound card

Wargames have a way of bringing history into sharp relief. Take SSG's latest stab at Wacht an Rhine, or the Battle of the Bulge, in *Decisive Battles of WWII: The Ardennes Offensive*. This last concerted Axis offensive pitted seven hundred thousand German soldiers against two million Allied Dubbed "the Bulge," for the large salient the Germans made in the Allied lines early on, the battle was characterized by heavy fighting and quick reversals. The Germans struck with speed and fury at the outset, but outnumbered and with no control of the air, there was no chance.

Watching Allied reinforcements keep coming (and coming) against my few weary units in *Ardennes Offensive* made it starkly apparent how doomed the Germans were. But if it was futile, why do wargamers return to the Bulge again and again? Probably because it was the most tactically interesting clash between the Americans and the Germans. This was the U.S. against the vaunted Nazi Blitzkrieg (sans German air power). And while the outcome of the entire campaign was certain, that of individual battles was not.

The combat screen is key to creating complex attacks.

SSG uses *Ardennes Offensive* to debut its new World War Two gaming engine, the successor to its Battlefront games of the late '80s. It's a traditional turn based regimental level game in the *V for Victory* and *Battlefront* tradition. You move flat unit counters on detailed maps in a series of eight scenarios including Bastogne, St Vith, Allied counterattacks, and the whole enchilada.

Ardennes Offensive looks similar to many other wargames, but it manages to succeed because it is simply very well executed.

Nothing about the design strikes one as new or even particularly innovative, but when you look at the details, you begin to see just how good *Ardennes Offensive* is. Supply is handled meticulously, as are reinforcements and "High Command Directives" (aka, Hitler is meddling) drawing units back from the front lines just as you're about to use them. Air interdiction is available, as are Greif units (English-speaking Germans sent behind enemy lines to interfere with traffic).

Most effective of all is the new combat system, which allows you not only to precisely shape attacks, but also lets you see how the computer calculates values and odds. When a unit attacks, you move to a combat screen, where you can assign more units to the attack, add artillery fire, and make other modifications. A table shows what each die roll will yield, such as an attacker losing one step (strength point) for a low roll, or inflicting 2 steps on the defender and forcing a retreat with a high roll. It's like peering under the hood.

But the finest part of *Ardennes* is unquestionably its AI. Enemies respond intelligently and realistically, making aggressive, coordinated attacks. I'm used to punching holes in shabby AI, but wasn't having a lot of luck doing that here.

Only the method of handling victory requirements is slightly unsatisfactory. The Germans were the underdogs here. Seizing and holding victory hexes is key to winning as the Germans, but the point allotments for German-held hexes are pretty stingy. When I can get and hold many of the major cities in the Bastogne scenario as the Germans, for instance, it seems absurd that I should lose so crushingly, particularly after fending off repeated counterattacks.

But the game engine itself is a little gem of well-integrated features, complex AI, and compulsively playable gaming. It may not be a very innovative design, but its execution is superb.

T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

83%

HIGHS: Surprisingly good AI. Good replication of classic tabletop wargames.

LOWS: Some questionable victory requirements. Retro design (which some will consider a "High").

BOTTOM LINE: Sure, it's just another Bulge game, but it's a very good one.

Lop off heads, sever limbs and bring your enemy to his knees (literally).
Coming This Fall!
Enemies will learn, adapt and fight together to kill you - the price: your head.
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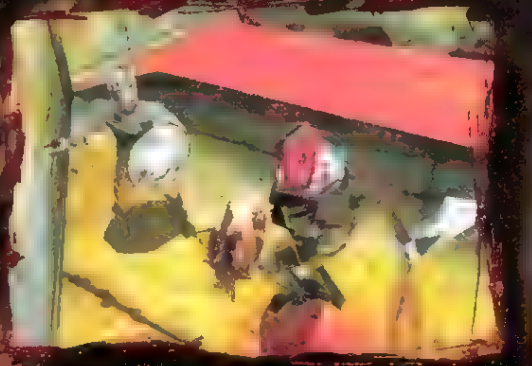

Lop off heads, sever limbs and bring your enemy to his knees (literally).

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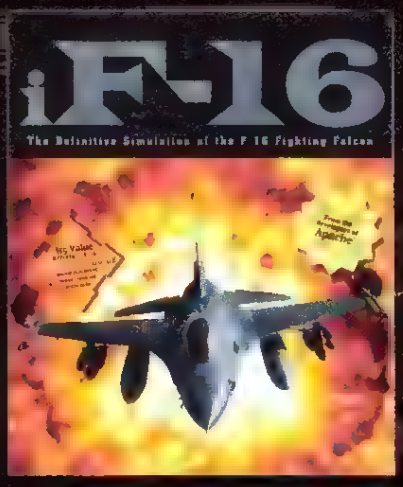

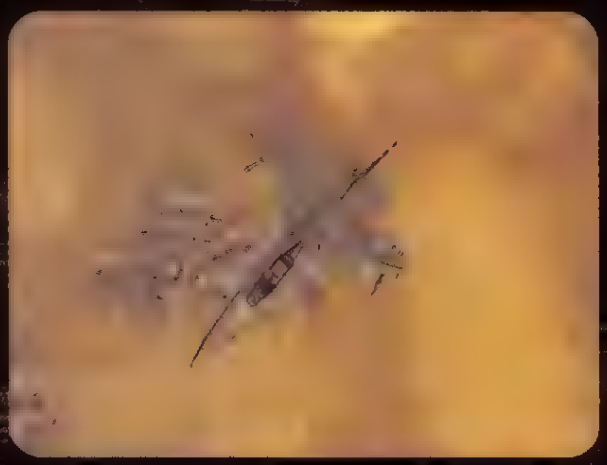

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http://www.imagicgames.com/pcgamer/f16

Developed by: Digital Integration

Published by: INTERACTIVE MAGIC

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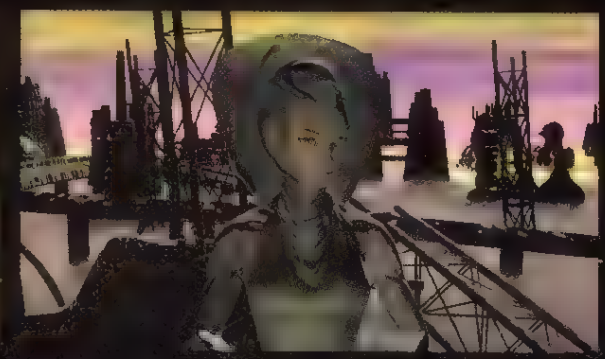

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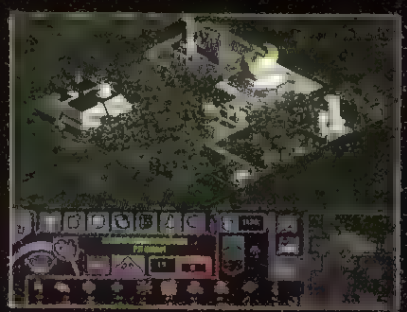

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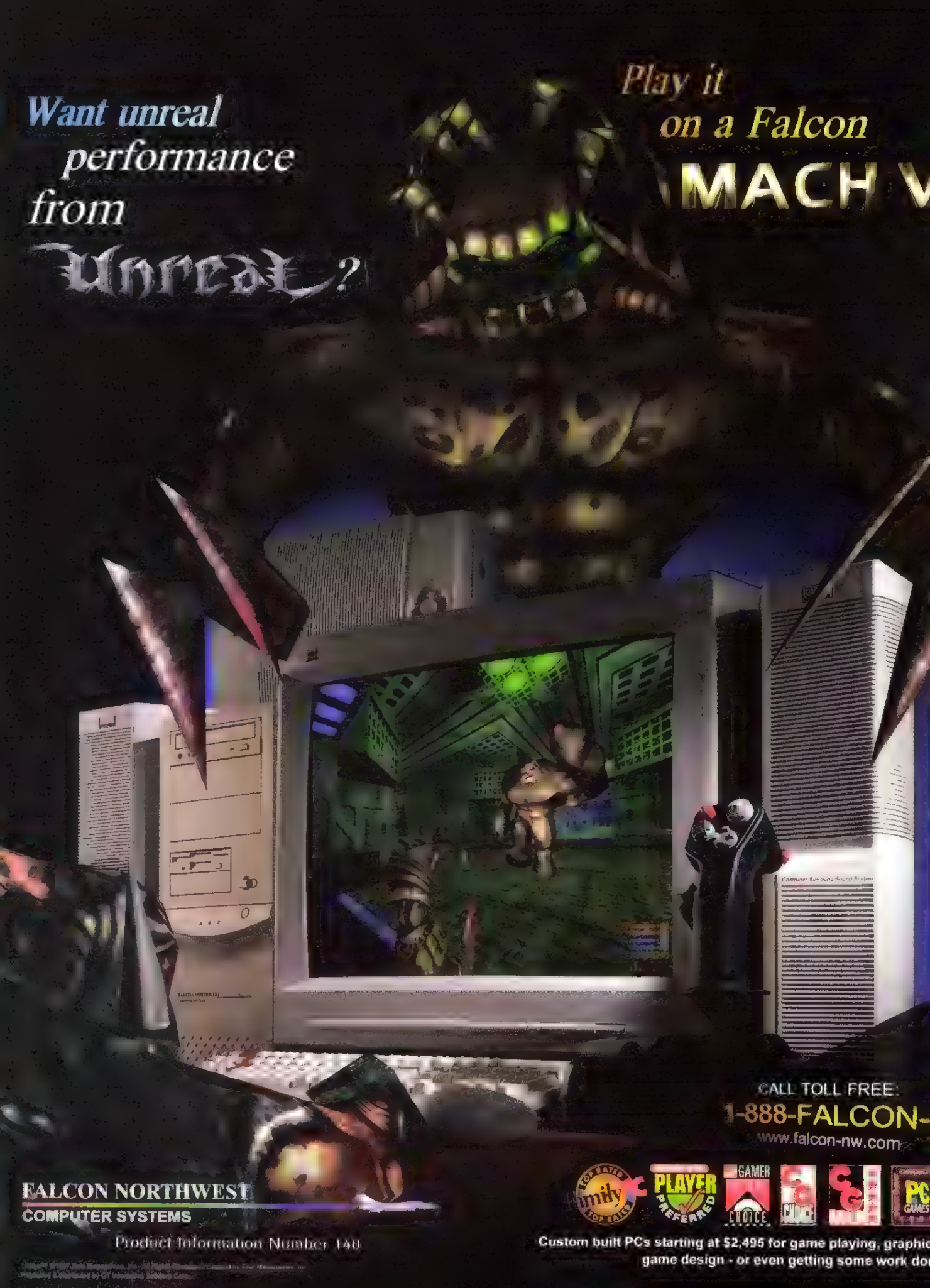
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The Hard Stuff

At last! *PC Gamer* in 3D!

This month we tackle a tricky subject: exactly what does "3D" mean in the world of computers? It sounds obvious, but it really isn't. 3D is a subjective term, and it can describe a wide variety of products.

Virtually any physical object is three dimensional, right? So the term "3D" can be attached to virtually any tangible object. Imagine walking down the small-appliance aisle in your local Wal-Mart and seeing a box with huge, eye-grabbing type claiming it contains the first-ever 3D Blender! "You can toss some 3D Ice Cream and 3D Chocolate Syrup in it and make yourself a 3D Shake! Buy Now And Receive A FREE 3D Orange Zester!!!"

Well, maybe that's an exaggeration. But it's certainly true that "3D" has become a buzz-word in PC gaming, used to describe everything from graphics to video cards to sound boards to gamepads.

So what's to keep a company from throwing around vague catch-phrases in a lame attempt to sell you a product? In a word, you. The first thing to do before buying a product with a questionable moniker is to read about it. That goes for computer stuff as well as blenders: is that Ultra Super 3D Joystick really what it claims to be, or is it kind of like 95 Percent Fat-Free All-Pork Polish Sausage? A good nutrition magazine will tell you about the sausage — and, of course, The Hard Stuff will keep you up to date on what's really 3D. If it's not what you hoped it was, *don't buy it.* Hanging onto your cash speaks louder than an angry letter to a company that already has your money.

That in mind, the brave purveyors of the Hard Stuff attempt to answer what may be the most common question that turns up in our mail: What is a 3D accelerator? Why do I need one? What do they mean by 3D sound? What makes a 3D joystick different from mine? Okay, maybe that amounts to more than one question, but you get the point. Besides, we'll go ahead and answer them all!

And yes, *PC Gamer* really is in 3D, and it always has been! Obviously, there's length and width, and there's plenty of depth, too — hey, it gets thicker every month!

Contents

Previews

3D: An In-Depth Look *The term "3D" is used everywhere, but what does it mean?* 268

ATI is Ready: *ATI is poised to take the Accelerated Graphics Port market by storm* 275

Reviews

NEC PowerPlayer 3020 *system* .....

Interlink VersaPoint Wireless Keyboard .....

InterAct Powerramp Mite *gamepad* .....

X36 Flight Control System *joysticks* .....

Cambridge SoundWorks PC Works *speakers* 286

Suncom G-Force Plus *joystick* 286

MIDILand Capriccio & Crescendo *speakers* .....

Logitech CyberMan II *joystick* 291

Diamond GyroMouse .....

Tech Q&A

Think you can stump us? *Bring it on.* 296

How We Rate The Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication, *boot*. Between our rigorous testing and the thorough bootMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

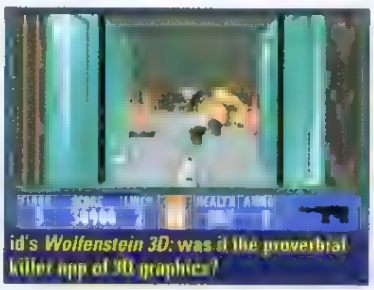
The term "3D" is used everywhere in computer gaming — but what does it really mean?

3D

An In-Depth Look

GLQuake on 3Dfx is widely considered the ultimate 3D game.

Thousands of years ago, (or maybe it was only ten), computer games were a simple and content group. They lived in small, isolated tribes with names like *Ultima, Jumpman,* and *Silent Service,* and they had beliefs that seem silly compared to an evolved, modern society such as ours. For example, they knew that since a monitor screen is (mostly) flat, their world was two-dimensional. Therefore they centered their lifestyles around bitmaps and sprites.



id's *Wolfenstein 3D:* was it the proverbial killer app of 3D graphics?

After centuries (okay, years) of such beliefs, a game called *Wolfenstein 3D* brought forth the notion that the world of PC games was *not* flat. Although *Wolfenstein 3D* was not the first game to foster such radical beliefs — the heresy began a few years earlier, in flight sims — it was a persuasive game, popular with all of its fellow games. Other games became confused; they knew that if they traveled too far in any direction, they would fall off the edge of the monitor. But *Wolfenstein 3D* and its predecessors preached the belief that they could also have *depth* that went beyond the flat surface of the video screen.

The other games saw *Wolfenstein 3D* take off like a rocket, and they, too, began to believe in the power of 3D. Today, most games believe in a 3D world, and games that cling to the flatlander school of thought are often considered crazy or foolish.

WHAT IS 3D?

Okay, so maybe that wasn't the most technical explanation of the 3D revolution. The point is this: there's an obvious, unavoidable trend toward 3D computer gaming, and some people aren't sure exactly what that means. The term 3D, meaning three dimensional, is one of the most misused monikers in the computer world, mostly since its definition is subject to wide interpretation. Webster's defines *three dimensional* as "a) of or having three dimensions. b) appearing to have depth or thickness in addition to height and width." In that sense, virtually anything that's tangible can be called 3D.

Some companies take advantage of that — especially when it comes to marketing game controllers. Technically, every controller in existence is a 3D controller: it physically has height, width, and depth. Does that make it an ideal controller for games set in 3D worlds? Maybe not, but it lets its manufacturer use the term "3D" without worrying about charges of false advertising.

Video equipment is a different matter. If a video device is referred to as a 3D video accelerator, that means it'll have at least some built-in ability (or at least be intended) to answer special video calls related to 3D graphics, which would otherwise be handled by the computer's CPU — thus taking the load off the processor and freeing it up for other operations.

Another emerging 3D technology lies in audio. 3D audio is different from surround or pseudo-surround sound, but once again you may not be able to tell that from the marketing. Any sound is *technically* three-dimensional because it travels through space from the speaker to your ears, some of its waves bouncing off everything else in the room on the way.

3D VIDEO

Have you ever tried to read all the way through a technical white-paper about a 3D video chipset? Of course not, or you'd still be drooling and babbling incoherently in a padded room. 3D video is an incredibly complicated matter that we will try to make understandable without taking every reader through an advanced programming course.

In the most basic sense, a graphic image on a PC is formed by a program telling the computer which of the dots that make up the monitor screen should have something in them. The simplest type of computer-displayed image is a monochrome image, which means that each pixel is either on or off, and there is only one color available. (In the old days, monochrome monitors usually displayed either green or amber text and graphics on a black background.)

In that case, there is only one bit per pixel. Of course, a bit is a computer term for a two-position variable, on or off, represented by 0 or 1 respectively. For a

monochromatic image, the entire data file would consist of positional data alone, telling the computer the locations of the pixels in question, and for each pixel there would be a 0 or a 1, to tell the computer whether or not to "light up" that pixel

Two-dimensional graphics are a little more complicated if you add color. Rather than simply turning a pixel on or off, the computer must know what *color* to make it To define a color, each pixel needs more than one bit: by using a combination of the values of several bits, programs can tell modern computers exactly which color to use out of 16 colors (4 bits per pixel), 256 colors (8 bits per pixel), 65,536 colors (16 bits per pixel), 1,677,7216 colors (24 bits per pixel), and more, on high-end machines The number of bits per pixel is known as color depth; that's what game companies are referring to when they say their new title has 16- or 24-bit graphics.

The resolution of the display is determined by how many pixels the computer is told to cram onto a screen. This is where we get the numbers describing video card and monitor capability, such as 640x480, 800x600, and so on. The numbers represent rows and columns of pixels that the computer is instructed to display: 640x480 means there are 640 columns of pixels across the screen, and 480 rows from top to bottom.

Since each level of color depth requires the computer to keep track of more bits in each pixel, and each level of resolution brings on more pixels, the demands of running higher resolutions at higher color depths increases exponentially. That's why video accelerators were first invented; limitations were reached, and it became impossible to display animation — which is, after all, a series of rapidly changing screens — at a smooth frame rate Video accelerator cards are designed made to take the strain off the processor in displaying high-quality video by doing some of the processing themselves. They come with their own RAM, which they use to store pixel data. This is why you can display greater resolutions with higher color depth if you have more RAM on your video card.

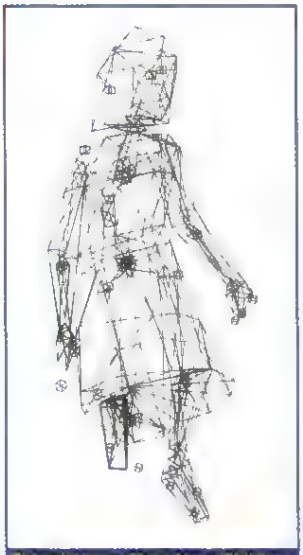
Just a few years ago, we were finally getting to the point where quality 2D video acceleration was a standard feature for any new system. PCs were able to draw high res, detailed images with speed and efficiency, but the images were flat. Game programmers used tricks to give objects the appearance of depth — for instance, they would create several different flat sprites for one object, each one from a separate point of view. This technique was used to good effect in the first two Wing Commander games and in early air combat sims like the original *Falcon* and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*. But it wasn't perfect; we were still unable to see an object from *every* perspective, like a real object. It was possible, but such capabilities were only seen on very high-end graphic workstations.

The gaming industry is almost singly responsible for bringing 3D graphics to the home user Games like *F-19 Stealth Fighter, Ultima Underworld, Wolfenstein 3D, NASCAR, Doom,* and dozens of others drove up the demand for quality 3D graphics.

The 3D graphic engines used in those games had limitations. As the graphics became more complex and the demand for higher resolution increased, even a good, fast PC with a high-quality 2D video card strained to maintain a smooth frame rate

Just as 2D video accelerators are designed to handle some or all of the task or rendering two-dimensional graphics, 3D accelerators were developed to relieve the CPU from the even more taxing job of animating three-dimensional images 3D accelerators can do some or all of the tricks that software-based 3D graphic engines popularized, and they do them faster and more efficiently than any software routine ever could. The result: higher frame rates and better graphics in 3D animation.

Some 3D accelerators come on circuit boards that also have 2D accelerators on them, while others are 3D add-on boards that work in conjunction with your existing 2D video card. It's easy to get confused if you're looking at buying a 3D accelerator: there are popular chipsets, which are created by chipset makers who then sell them to video card manufacturers, which incorporate them in their prod-



This girl from *City of Lost Children* began life as a complex wireframe of interlinked triangles.

3D Boards

Here are the major contenders in the 3D gaming market. They're arranged in order of PC Gamer's recommendation.

CHIPSET	MAKER	AVAILABLE ON
Voodoo Rush	3Dfx	Hercules Stingray 128/3D, Integraph Intense 3D Voodoo
Voodoo Graphics	3Dfx	Diamond Monster 3D, Orchid Righteous 3D, Deltron Realvision Flash 3D
Verite V1000	Rendition	Creative Labs 3D Blaster, Integraph Intense 3D 100, Canopus Total 3D, Sierra Screamin' 3
PowerVR	NEC	VideoLogic Apocalypse 3D (3D only), Apocalypse 5D
3D Rage Pro	ATI	ATI XPERT@Play, XPERT@Work
3D Rage II	ATI	ATI PC2TV, All-in-Wonder
3D Rage	ATI	ATI 3D Xpression
Matrox MGA-1164SG	Matrox	Mystique 220
Matrox MGA-1064SG	Matrox	Mystique
ViRGE series	S3	Dozens of boards and OEM computers
Cirrus Logic	Laguna 3D	Creative Labs Graphic Blaster 3D, TechWorks Ultimate 3D, VideoLogic GraphixStar 550

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The Future of Hardware

Impact

With so many companies producing force-feedback driving wheel/flight yokes, it's hard for a product to stand out. Cybernet systems is doing so through specialization: it is producing one of each. The CyberImpact line of force feedback products should be out next month, and it includes a two-axis flight yoke with a throttle, a single-axis steering wheel, and a joystick. Flight yokes and steering wheels have decidedly different feels, and although the yoke will function as a steering wheel, it's important for racing fans to have a choice. The CyberImpact steering wheel will not have the limited turn radius of the flight yoke.

PowerCube Plus

Altec Lansing is buffing up its popular PowerCube speakers. The new ACS48 multimedia speaker system is more powerful than the popular ACS45 line, and Altec has enclosed the new subwoofer in wood for deeper, more resonant bass. The two 20-watt speakers, coupled with a 40-watt sub, should provide enough power for any gamer, and Altec says the sound quality will satisfy picky audiophiles.

Intergraph Does Voodoo

Intergraph, long-time leader in high-end 3D accelerators, has announced a new board based on the 3Dfx Voodoo Rush chipset. The Intense 3D Voodoo graphics accelerator card will

Continued on page 274

ucts. For instance, Rendition makes the Verite V1000 chipset, which Intergraph uses to produce the Intense 3D 100 board. Check out the chart to help clear up the maze of chips, cards and their makers.

So what, exactly, do 3D accelerators do? You read about all of these features with names like MIP-mapping and bilinear filtering, but what does it actually mean?

In 3D graphics, objects are built on wireframes of those objects. Wireframes, in turn, are made up of geometrical shapes called polygons. In most cases, triangles are the only polygons used to build the wireframes; they can be combined and stretched into incredibly complex patterns.

The wireframe is then filled and shaded through one of several methods. The simplest is called flat shading, in which the object is simply painted the one color. That's fast and easy for a computer to do, but it doesn't look real. Gouraud shading is much more realistic; the shade of the object is calculated with respect to a virtual light source. For instance, a cube will have a lighter shade on the side facing the light, and darker shades on its remaining sides.

Texture mapping is a step closer to realism. This method takes a flat bitmap and scales it to fit on a 3D object. Nearly every object in today's 3D games is texture mapped, from the walls and structural objects to the enemies, if they are 3D objects and not sprites. Since bitmaps are actually flat graphics, they must be bent or skewed in accordance with the angle from which they are being viewed, the pattern must be larger where it appears closer to your point of view, and it must gradually and realistically shrink as it stretches away from you. This is known as *perspective correction*. Some bitmaps, such as those on liquid surfaces or the famous movie screen in *Duke Nukem 3D*, actually move: these are known as animated textures.

As objects get farther from you, it becomes unnecessary to render all of the detail that their up-close texture may require; if a monster is so far away it only takes up a few pixels of your screen, you are not going to be able to see its teeth. *MIP-mapping* is a method by which several different texture maps are alternately placed on a single 3D object; which texture map is used depends on how far the object is from you. Of course, some textures you will not see at all, if something else is in front of them. A popular technique called *Z-buffering* is used so the graphics processor knows which pixels to draw. Each pixel is given a mathematical value representing its depth: with each frame drawn, the 3D card will compare these values for each pixel to determine which ones are behind others, and not draw them. Some 3D accelerators, such as PowerVR, use different methods to determine which pixels are drawn.

This is the player's ship in *Terracide*, filled in and flat-shaded.

Here's the same ship with Gouraud shading...

...with texture maps added...

...and with perspective correction added. Notice how the lettering on the side looks more natural.

Now bilinear filtering has been added. Note the reduction in those ugly "jaggies."

Since pixels, which are dots on the screen, are of a fixed size, but texture maps change with respect to your perspective, the "blocks" within texture maps often take up several pixels. These blocks, called *texels*, can simply be rendered as directly from the original texture map, but this can result in "jaggies," diagonals and circles that look blocky. That method is called point sampling. *Bilinear filtering* can smooth that out, the computer checks the color values of the surrounding texels and alters the shade of individual pixels in order to create smoother transitions. For example, if one portion of a bitmap is blue, and the next is black, the pixels near where the two colors meet will be shaded gradually from blue to black to avoid a solid, harsh jump from one color to the other. *Trilinear filtering* is an even better, more complicated method of smoothing texture maps; it adds smoothing during the transition from one MIP-mapped texture to another.

Transparency effects, collectively known as *alpha blending*, let some pixels appear transparent in varying degrees, right up to being invisible. This can be used for really cool lighting effects, such as the glow surrounding explosions in *GLQuake* or the bright lasers in *G-Police*.

Those are the basic 3D effects usually handled by the hardware of a 3D accelerator. 3D acceleration is not a new technology overall, but it is new to the home computer. 3D accelerators will continue to become faster and more efficient, and game programmers will be able to make prettier games which run faster and more smoothly.

3D SOUND

If you think your Sound Blaster 16 and your Labtec speakers are good enough, it may be because you haven't heard a 3D audio system. From Dolby Surround to A3D, there are several excellent methods to immerse yourself in sound.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 274

Welcome to
the new landscape
of War.

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PRESENTS...

TOTAL ANNIHILATION™

The New Landscape Of War

In a distant part of the Galaxy, the Core and the Arm continue a thousand year battle over long forgotten ideals, destroying everything in their path...

TOTAL ANNIHILATION is a real-time war game featuring true 3D terrain and run-time generated 3D units. Tanks drive up and over hills, tilting and rocking with each bump in the landscape and impact with enemy weapons. Battle on diverse landscapes, including lava worlds, ice planets, desert valleys, alien tundra, towering mountain peaks and vast island-dotted oceans. Build defenses high in the hills for a better view and a better shot. Giant Bertha cannons pound the enemy from across the world. Planes bank and dive in intense air-to-air combat. Amphibious tanks drive into and dive under water for surprise attacks. Download new reinforcements from the web and swarm the enemy with hundreds of ever evolving units.

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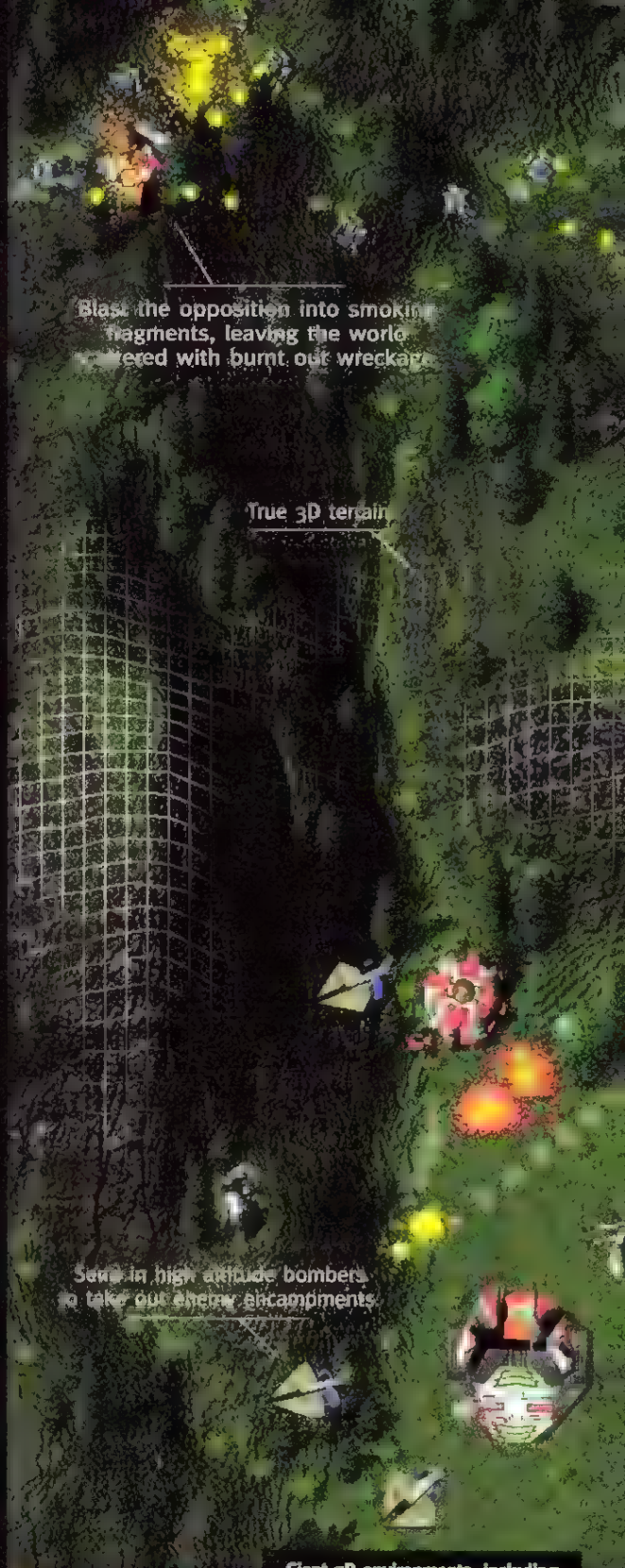

Blast the opposition into smoking fragments, leaving the world littered with burnt out wreckage.
True 3D terrain
Send in high altitude bombers to take out enemy encampments.

Take out a radar tower to cripple enemy intelligence.

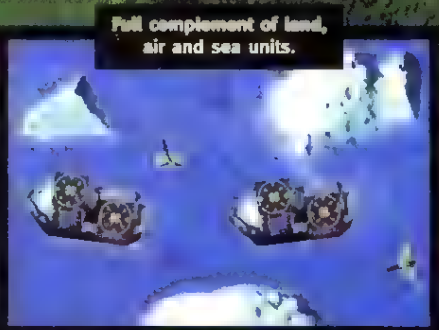
Control the high ground.

The forest provides perfect cover for surprise invasions.

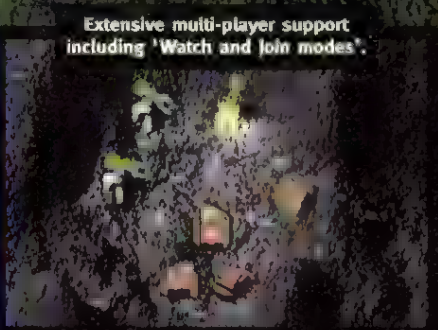
3D tanks move smoothly over the hill as they move into position.

Over 150 units and 50 missions.

Full complement of land, air and sea units.



Extensive multi-player support including 'Watch and Join modes'.



Peripheral Visions

Continued from page 270

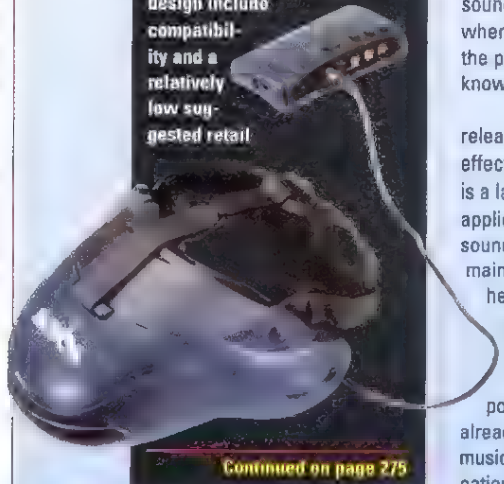
be distributed worldwide by Electronic Arts and will contain a three-game bundle including the awesome *MotoRacer GT*. The single card will combine a 128-bit 2D Windows accelerator with the Voodoo 3D chipset and, unlike the first consumer Voodoo Rush products, will be VESA 2.0 compliant in hardware.

Destination: DVD

While we thought the Gateway 2000 Destination was a great living room PC, it came up slightly lacking in terms of cutting-edge technology. Maybe Gateway heard our cries; the new line of Destinations are DVD-equipped, turning the big-screen PC into a full-blown home movie theater. Not only that, but the latest Destinations will also include, at last, a 3D accelerator, making the big-screen PC a gaming system to be reckoned with. The pumped-up Destinations should be shipping by the time you read this.

Monitor On Your Head

Philips Magnavox is bravely jumping into the extremely troubled "virtual reality headgear" market. The Scuba headset is targeted at immersion, and nothing more. It's not a VR device — it doesn't offer head-tracking — and it's not a set of flickery "3D" goggles. It's simply a monitor and headphones that you wear on your head. Advantages of the Philips design include compatibility and a relatively low suggested retail



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Dolby Surround is seeing a surge of support in the face of obsolescence. The standard is certainly an improvement over plain stereo sound, but it and its newer sibling, the DVD-supported Dolby Digital, require at least four speakers

There are other schemes, like JVC's SRS, which claim to create three-dimensional sound through two speakers, but they generally just widen the existing stereo field by eliminating crosstalk between the speakers. Even under optimal conditions,

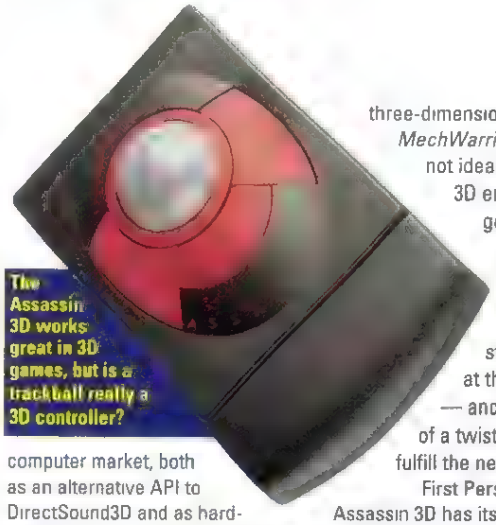
Qsound's UltraQ is a space-age-looking device that decodes 3D audio signals.

the effect isn't nearly as convincing as true surround sound.

Recently, some audio lab technician realized that people hear sounds from all around them — above, below, behind, etc. — with only two ears. If that's possible, then it *must* be possible to create three-dimensional sound with two speakers. After all, the way you can tell which direction a sound comes from has to do with the fact that a sound will reach one of your ears a split-second before the other one. It's possible to stagger the sound between two speakers to simulate that effect. Thus, if the position of each sound source in a game is tracked, the sound it makes can be altered to sound as if it was coming from where the object is in relation to the player's position. This is known as positional audio.

Several companies have released solutions to bring us that effect. Microsoft DirectSound3D is a largely ignored software application with 3D positional sound decoding — ignored mainly because it depends too heavily on the system's CPU, which means a game's frame rate takes a nasty hit.

QSound, an alternative positional sound scheme, is already established in the world of music CDs and other audio applications. It's moving rapidly into the computer market, both as an alternative API to DirectSound3D and as hardware decoding solutions such as UltraQ, a peripheral which plugs in between the sound card and speakers and decodes QSound signals.



The Assassin 3D works great in 3D games, but is a trackball really a 3D controller?

Aureal Semiconductor has developed a hardware-only solution which not only has its own API, but also functions as a DirectSound accelerator: it will handle DirectSound calls in its processor to increase the frame rate of DirectSound games. Currently, it's available on the Diamond Monster Sound, and game support is growing rapidly.

3D CONTROLLERS

In the physical world, 3D is a frustratingly subjective term. Since anything you can hold is, in essence, three-dimensional, controllers with the word "3D" in their names have been popping up everywhere. The Microsoft Sidewinder 3D joystick, InterAct's 3D Program Pad, the Assassin 3D and others have made various claims of being 3D controllers, and it's hard to dispute that. Any controller can be used for 3D games.

Respectively, those controllers are a joystick, a gamepad, and a trackball. Each one has merits that set it apart from others like it: the Sidewinder adds a twist axis to the usual up-down/left-right axes; the 3D Program Pad is extremely programmable; and the Assassin works with through the gameport as a digital gaming device that supplements your existing joystick. Why are these not 3D controllers?

The Sidewinder comes closest. The twist axis actually does create an advantage in maneuvering through a three-dimensional game like *MechWarrior 2*, but it's not ideal. Games set in 3D environments generally require the player to look, turn, move, and strafe — often at the same time — and the addition of a twist axis doesn't fulfill the need.

First Person Gaming's Assassin 3D has its heart in the right place, but it's not a 3D controller any more than a trackball is. It can team up with a joystick or the keyboard to augment control in a 3D game, and it's as intuitive as a mouse, which is nice for gamers who don't want a year-long learning curve to conquer before they feel comfortable with a controller.

The 3D Program Pad is a very nice gamepad, but its name contains the most suspicious use of 3D in the bunch. Basically, it's a programmable gamepad. That's it. It's not any more a three-dimensional controller than any other gamepad (on the other hand, it's a lot more comfortable than most).

The two true 3D controllers, amazingly, don't have the word 3D in their names. The SpaceOrb 360, from Spacetec IMC, and Logitech's CyberMan II have one very significant advantage over other wannabe 3D controllers: six axes. These devices allow you to turn your head, strafe, jump, run, turn, and duck with the twitch of a finger, and without the need to find keys or buttons. This makes them a favorite of *Quake* freaks who want the ultimate in twitch control, but it comes with a price: it takes a long time and a light, precise touch to become proficient in their use. Until you've got at least a few hours of use under your belt, expect to wander into walls and over cliffs while attempting to perfect your control over these devices.

The hard-to-master SpaceOrb 360 is a true 3D controller.

ATI is Ready For AGP

■ **ATI is poised to take the Accelerated Graphics Port market by storm.**

The first round of high-end, consumer-level 3D video cards saw ATI lagging behind — but just a little. Its 3D chipset, the Rage, lacked a few features found in the 3Dfx or Rendition chips, but ATI was already ahead of the pack in a surprisingly overlooked area: television on the PC. First with its PC/TV card, then with the outstanding All-in-Wonder, ATI showed that it can pack a video card full of features without resorting to second-rate gimmickry.

Its newest batch of cards, the XPERT line, packs the same array of features as a matter of course, with a few new ones. 3D acceleration has been greatly improved in the new Rage Pro chip will support virtually every Direct3D feature; the quality of the TV output is also better, reducing flicker and increasing clarity; and MPEG-2 support has been added. Unfortunately, the first-round of XPERT cards will lack a TV tuner.

The Rage Pro is the first video accelerator to support 133MHz (2X) AFP.

ATI also has the jump on AGP, Intel's new, ultra-fast video solution. AGP stands for Accelerated Graphics Port, a system bus designed for the high bandwidth demands of 3D graphics, and it's poised to blow away any video solution on the current market. AGP will allow the full use of system memory for video texture storage, which should result in lower-priced video cards that won't need as much dedicated RAM. The result will be faster video with richer textures at higher resolutions.

The AGP standard is already evolving, and a super-fast 2X mode will be available by the time the standard becomes mainstream. "We are the first to offer 2X AGP," said Eric Lundgren, referring to a 133MHz standard that doubles the data transfer rate of the original, 66MHz AGP.

Look for the first AGP video cards in the last quarter this year.

Peripheral Visions

Continued from page 28

price of $299. The Scuba will be available first for consoles, with a PC version slated for some time in the second quarter of 1998.

TechWorks Touches Up The Ultimate 3D

TechWorks has updated its Ultimate 3D graphics accelerator (reviewed in the June 1997 *PC Gamer*). Many of the complaints raised in that review have been dealt with: A chip on the 2D/3D video card has been replaced to correct the blurring experienced at higher screen resolutions, the drivers have been updated, and a game bundle is now included in the box. Included in the bundle are an *MDK* demo and *Descent II*. The Ultimate 3D is based on Cirrus Logic's Laguna chipset.

PCG

Product Information Number 300

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A NEW FORM OF LIFE..

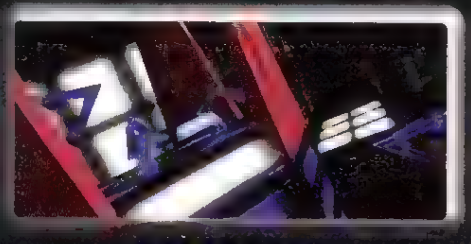
You've accessed Galapagos™: an unstable, technologically advanced world of electric blue corridors and ominous dimensional gates. Populated by legions of mechanized soldiers, Galapagos overthrows neighboring worlds and aligns them to its internal dimension, draining resources and annihilating inhabitants.

Twisted by genius and greed, the creators of Galapagos experiment with pillaged resources to construct pre-programmed machines of war. **Mendel is the exception.**

Mendel is a synthetic organism with the unique ability to learn. Beneath his alloy shell is a technology that serves as his mind, allowing him to learn and adapt to his environment through trial and error. He is the prototype to a new generation of autonomous war machines, and if his engineering is reproduced, Galapagos would be unstoppable!

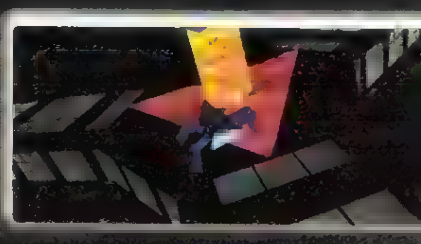
But Mendel is harmless and alone. He's trapped in a laboratory awaiting torturous experiments designed to test the scope of this new technology. You can help him, but you can't control him. If Mendel doesn't escape, Galapagos will prosper, and its tyrannical army will ravage the galaxy.

Mendel must escape from Galapagos!



GALAPAGOS
Tyrannous Command Center

SINE
Toxic Cloud Mine



LUMEN
Subterranean Powerplant

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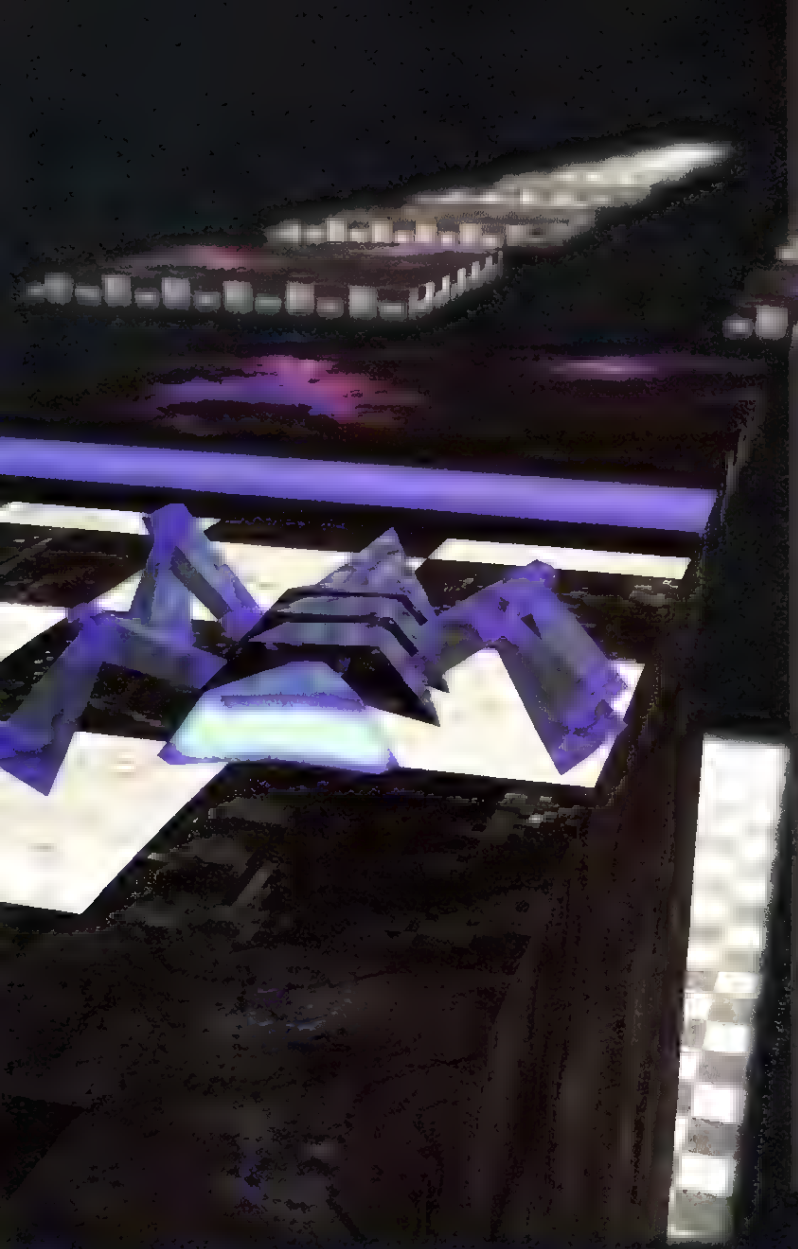


NERM™
Non-stationary Entropic Reduction Mapping

In the scientific realm of Artificial Life, Anark has developed a revolutionary form of technology called NERM.

NERM lends itself to everything from enhanced industrial productivity to digital switching systems used in telecommunications. And now NERM changes the face of video games.

Mendel, the synthetic organism in Galapagos, utilizes NERM technology to survive. Much like a living organism, Mendel learns and develops new behaviors to survive. If Mendel steps off a bridge and sinks into a glowing pit of acid, he melts and regenerates, his mind is altered by the experience, and he becomes less likely to repeat his mistake.

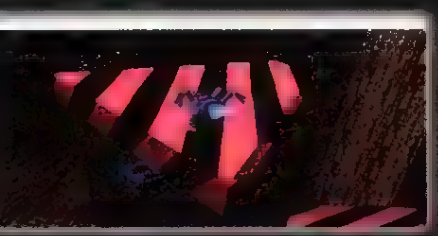
In other words, Mendel is not pre-programmed; he learns right before your eyes. NERM allows Mendel to express a number of behaviors resulting from the same stimulus. This flexibility is impossible with other adaptive technologies and makes every game of Galapagos unique.

NERM Controller Converging on Logistic Map

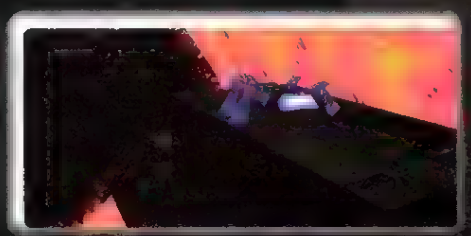
S EMERGING

ORE THAN ANY OTHER TITLE EVER PREVIEWED IN NEXT ENERATION, THE TECHNOLOGIES PIONEERED IN THIS TITLE AY SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE THE WAY WE PLAY GAMES IN THE EXT SEVERAL YEARS." — NEXT GENERATION

GALAPAGOS™
MENDEL'S ESCAPE



PLON
Lethal Refinery



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Gothic Temple

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Product Information Number 142

NEC PowerPlayer 3020

Company: NEC
www.nec.com

Phone: (800) 632-4636 (TO ORDER)
(800) 632-4554 (TECH SUPPORT)

Price: $2,599

NEC presents a powerful, all-inclusive system that any self-respecting gamer would be proud of.

The NEC PowerPlayer line is now into its third generation. NEC was one of the first major, national computer companies to take the idea of computers dedicated to gaming seriously, and it's been getting better and better at it. One look at the PowerPlayer 3020's spec sheet speaks volumes: NEC pulled no punches in designing a serious gaming PC. There's very little second-rate hardware to be found here; the system's components seem to have been carefully culled from top performance lists everywhere and molded into a sweet machine.

Simply unpacking the huge box and setting up the system is a pleasure, as almost every component is truly top of the line. Speaking of the box — don't believe the picture on it: the Gravis GRiP gamepad system has been replaced by a pair of Microsoft SideWinder gamepads; that's an improvement, although a pair of Gravis Gamepad Pros might've been even better. Whatever the case, the simple fact that the system includes more than one gamepad is a testament to NEC's effort to create a monster gaming system.

Getting this system up and running is simple; for beginners, there's a big, step-by-step setup poster with pictures to help you get all of the connections right the first time. Take note that the price above doesn't include a monitor; NEC does, however, offer an excellent line of monitors covering a wide price range. We tested this system, a 200MHz MMX, with a generic 17" monitor.

Upon initial power-up, you'll be asked to enter the product ID code from the Windows 95 certificate of authenticity, but don't worry; virtually everything is already set up for you, from the Microsoft Game Device Profiler for the gamepads to a full set of real-mode drivers for rebooting into true DOS mode. All of the games and applications in the generous bundle are already installed, and all of the hardware is set up perfectly.

Advent makes it easy to annoy your neighbors with this quality sound system.

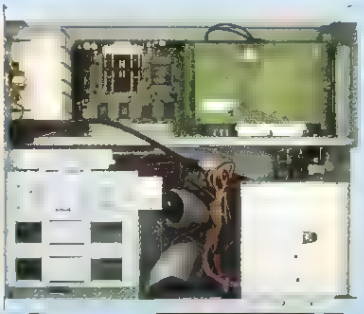
Two SideWinder game pads were included for head-to-head gaming.

Speaking of the hardware, most of it is well chosen. A 2MB ATI 3D Rage video chipset is built onto the system board, and a connector makes room for a 2MB upgrade. In addition to that, one of the PCI slots is occupied by a Diamond Monster 3D for awesome 3Dfx acceleration. The presence of the ATI and 3Dfx accelerators is a little surprising, since NEC teams with VideoLogic to produce the rival PowerVR chip. But it's a pleasant surprise; 3Dfx is the current king of 3D video.

For audio, NEC plugged in a Sound Blaster AWE 32. There are newer sound cards to be had, but the AWE 32 virtually guarantees compatibility with any game you care to throw at this system. A three-piece, 50-watt Advent AV370 speaker system kicks out the jams with a big, thumpin' subwoofer and those unique triangular Advent satellites. One of the nice things about the speaker system — besides the clear, accurate sound — is the fact that all of the controls are above the desk; the left speaker houses volume, tone, and balance, so there's no need to crawl under the table to tweak the bass.

Besides the SideWinder gamepads, NEC includes a Thrustmaster Flight Control System. If you don't already have a better joystick, you'll probably want to set aside some cash to replace this one.

The system's case is a bit of a disappointment. From the outside, it's a sharp-looking, mid-sized tower. It lacks a reset button, but there's an interesting sleep-mode switch that puts the system into a power-saving mode with the monitor and hard drive powered down. Don't worry if your little brother runs in and presses it during a game of *Triple Play*, though; sleep mode is intelligent and won't engage while a game or application has control of the processor.



Where do you put your new stuff? The fat case could have more internal bays and expansion slots.

The case's major problem lies in the skimpy drive-bay situation. Only three external 5" bays are provided, one of which houses the CD-ROM drive. A single internal 3" bay holds the ample, 4GB hard drive. Oddly, the hard drive is separated into two 2GB partitions, drives C and D, but the CD-ROM drive is set up as drive F; there's no E drive in sight. Go figure.

The 3" floppy drive is built to fit its own

bootMarks

Norton SI bootMark: 58.1
(TESTS CPU AND SYSTEM BOARD PERFORMANCE)

Sysmark 32: 153
(TEST VIDEO AND I/O PERFORMANCE)

MDK Perfest: 91
(TESTS DIRECTX PERFORMANCE)

Dekabilizer: 6.03
(TESTS MMX PERFORMANCE)

Terramark: 834
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)

***Quake* time demo: 34.6 fps**
(TESTS FLOATING POINT PERFORMANCE)

***Duke 3D* time demo: 35 fps (640x480)**
26 fps (800x600)
(TESTS DOS GAMING PERFORMANCE)

System Specs

SYSTEM
Processor: 200MHz Pentium with MMX
RAM: 32MB EDO
Cache: 265K Pipeline Burst

STORAGE
Hard Drive: 4GB IDE
CD-ROM: 16X IDE
1.44MB floppy drive

EXPANSION
Internal 3" bays: 1 (occupied)
External 5" bays: 3/2 free
Bus slots: 2 PCI (1 free), 2 ISA (1 free), 1 shared (occupied)

VIDEO
Base: ATI 3D Rage on motherboard, 2MB EDO RAM upgradeable to 4MB
3D: Diamond Monster 3D
Monitor: none

AUDIO
Sound Card: Sound Blaster AWE32
Speaker System: Advent AV370

OTHER
Modem: Boca 33.6Kbps fax/data/voice

unique bay, so there's no guarantee you'll be able to replace it with anything new that comes down the line. The case is also built around a proprietary system board; it's fully Socket-7 compatible and supports RAM configurations up to 128MB and 66MHz clock speeds, so it *is* upgradable — but don't plan to eventually replace it with a Pentium II board; standard motherboards won't fit. The onboard Level 2 cache is only 256K, and there's no way to upgrade it to a more desirable 512K.

Frankly, it's the proprietary motherboard that kept the PowerPlayer out of Editors' Choice territory; gamers need the ability to upgrade freely, and this system, like any other, will only be state-of-the-art for so long.

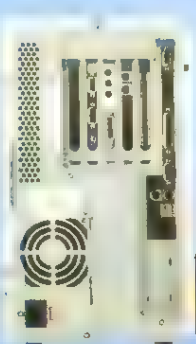
While this is not the ideal system for a hands-on techie, it *is* a performer. It aced all of the bootMarks, clocking in with a *Norton SI* bootMark of 51.8 and an *MDK PerfTest* of 91. The *Quake* bootMark checked in at 34.6 FPS in the 3Dfx-accelerated *GLQuake*, and the *TerraMark* Direct3D test came in at 280 in level 1, 280 in level 2, and 274 in level three for a total *TerraMark* score of 834. DOS gaming is very nice, too, with *Duke Nukem 3D* frame rates of 35 fps at 640x480 and 26 fps at 800x600.

NEC was generous, but not choosy, with its games bundle. Full versions were included of *Descent II*, *POD*, *Eraser*, *You Don't Know Jack*, *VR Soccer*, *Battle Arena Toshinden* and *Microsoft Return of Arcade* (*Dig Dug*, *Pac-Man*, *Galaxians*, and *Pole Position*). A TEN front-end was also included, with demos of *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Quake*, *Command & Conquer*, and *Necrodome*.

This stocky mid-tower doesn't have a reset button, but notice the little sleep mode switch.

But the software bundle goes beyond games. Two McAfee programs, *VirusScan* and *WebScan*, were fully configured, as well as a bunch of Microsoft productivity titles: *Microsoft Money*, *Microsoft Publisher*, *Microsoft Encarta*, and *Microsoft Works 4.0* will help you get your homework done between gaming sessions.

NEC also threw in a few of its own programs which are not only *intended* to make life easier; they actually deliver. The *NEC Help Center* really is helpful, with informative text about nearly every aspect of the PowerPlayer packed in a friendly interface. NEC's communication software is among the best we've ever seen. *RingCentral* is a wonderful front-end for the included voice modem, providing an easy-to-use answering machine/speaker phone. *RingCentral* also stores phone numbers for automatic dialing, sends and receives faxes, and allows remote message retrieval.



The vertical expansion slots are a dead giveaway of a proprietary system board and limited upgrade potential.

Utilizing everything to its fullest is made even simpler by NEC's excellent off-line documentation. Two well-written manuals are included with the PowerPlayer. One describes every component of the computer and how to use it, including the gaming devices, audio equipment, and software. The other is a hands-on guide to upgrading the PC (where it's possible) and explains the basics, like how to add or remove SIMMs and expansion cards.

The PowerPlayer is an excellent, well-designed gaming system that would rival the very best if not for the nagging flaw of using a proprietary system board. Even in spite of that, the PowerPlayer is well worth your gaming dollar if you're not a hands-on kind of PC user; this is a perfect entry-level system for the gamer who just wants to jump in and play games with little or no fuss.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: This is very user friendly; it has a generous software bundle; almost all components are top-notch.

LOWS: The proprietary system board limits upgrade potential; case doesn't leave much room for expansion.

BOTTOM LINE: This is an excellent gaming system, but gearheads may be frustrated by its limited expandability.

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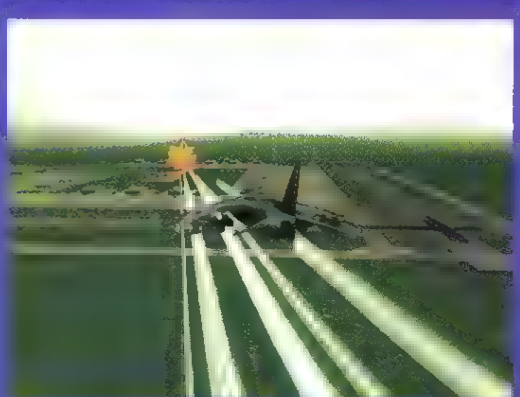

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an intriguing mix of
simulation and strategy ...
with the potential to
redefine the two genres."

Computer Gaming World

Product Information Number 130

EIDOS

Interlink VersaPoint Wireless Keyboard

Company: Interlink
www.interlinkelec.com

Phone: (800) 340-1331 (TO ORDER)

Price: $159.99

The VersaPoint Wireless Keyboard is not the answer for wireless gaming and web surfing.

There are those of us who will not stop until absolutely nothing on our desk has a cord attached to it. It is we who are fueling the cordless device boom — along with people who actually have legitimate need to control a PC from a few feet away, like those who do computerized presentations or surf the web in their living rooms.

The VersaPoint Wireless Keyboard combines an 81-key keyboard and laptop-style touchpad into a small, sleek package. The tiny VersaPoint is barely more than a foot long and weighs just a pound and a half. Its base unit plugs into both the keyboard and mouse ports.

The keyboard runs on four AA batteries, which are included in the box. Interlink says that since the keyboard is in a constant "sleep mode" between keystrokes and touchpad input, the batteries will last about a year — unfortunately, we couldn't wait that long to test the validity of that claim. The VersaPoint uses what Interlink calls "omni-directional" infrared signals to communicate with the base, meaning that the keyboard can be turned to nearly any angle and still talk to the base unit.

The VersaPoint's keys are tiny, laptop-style keys rather than the full-stroke equivalents you'll find on a standard keyboard. Below the spacebar sits a touch pad and left and right mouse buttons. Interlink also encloses an easy-to-lose stylus for more precise touchpad operation, but it looks exactly like a black ball point pen and can disappear on a cluttered desk within seconds. A trackball would have been a better all-around choice; even a decent touchpad like this one can be annoying during scrolling-intensive operations like web-surfing or a game of *WarCraft II*. We tried hooking up a cordless mouse to use in conjunction with the keyboard, but the VersaPoint requires both its keyboard and mouse connections to function at all.

The VersaPoint works with generic mouse and keyboard drivers, and Interlink includes mouse enhancement software that works like a very primitive version of Logitech's *MouseWare* or *Microsoft IntelliMouse*. There's very little added functionality over the generic Windows 95 mouse software.

Full-stroke keys, a trackball, and RF (radio) communication in place of infrared would've made it considerably more tolerable. It's a decent wireless keyboard, but there are better ones out there.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: It's small and light; the most precise touchpad we've seen.

LOWS: A trackball would have been better; laptop-style keys are clumsy; IR communication requires constant line of sight, annoying for such a mobile product.

BOTTOM LINE: We suggest that you hold out for something better.

InterAct Powerramp Mite

Company: InterAct
www.actlab.com

Phone: (604) 278-3650

Price: $29

At some point, every gamer must endure the hassle, frustration, and humbling experience of playing games on their keyboard — whether they want to or not. As unfathomable as it sounds, there are game developers who refuse to acknowledge the importance of native joystick/gamepad support (*Alone in the Dark, Twinsen's Odyssey,* and *Ecstatica 2,* just to name a few) leaving us with no option but to slog away on the keyboard. But there's a remedy to these keyboard-only games, thanks to the folks at InterAct. Smaller sibling to the Powerramp (reviewed in the May 1997 issue), the Powerramp Mite is loaded with ten buttons, a comfortable directional pad, a four-way switch, and programmable features. Unlike most gamepads, The Mite doesn't plug into your gameport; instead it plugs into your keyboard port and acts solely as a keyboard emulator, allowing you to play any game with keyboard support.

Comfortable, affordable, and easy to use, the Powerramp Mite is an excellent gamepad.

The benefit to this approach is quick and easy configuration in any game, without hassle. Each button can be programmed with commands that can be triggered by a single touch, and the Mite doesn't require special software to store or record the information. Just press the Setup button on the pad, hold down the button you want to program, press the keystroke (or keystrokes) you want to store in it, and you're done. There are four Macro slots (plus a default) that allow you to save the commands for four of your favorite games. Your programs remain stored in the Mite even if you unplug it and move it to a new computer.

But it's the ability to program multiple commands into one button that proves the Mite's greatest strength. The four-way switch can be programmed with as many as 10 keystrokes; the 10 remaining buttons — six buttons on the right side of the controller, four trigger buttons on the front — can be programmed with six keystrokes each. This sort of programmability gives you a great deal of flexibility; in *Tomb Raider* for example, you can assign a forward roll (three keystrokes) to a single key, and in fighting games, you could assign devastating combo attacks to every button.

As we approach a new era of USB controllers, digital interfaces, and proprietary solutions, the Mite may be one of those devices whose low-tech approach to gaming will ultimately win the day with backward compatibility out the wazoo and no liabilities that would prevent it from working in an uncertain future.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great for games without built-in gamepad or joystick support; comfortable feel; the low-tech approach was a good way to go.

LOWS: Four-way switch is hard to reach during fierce battles.

BOTTOM LINE: Great feel, quality construction, and easy programmability make the Powerramp Mite a winner.

X36 Flight Control System

Company: Saitek
www.saitek.com

Phone: (310) 212-5412 (TO ORDER)

Price: $149.99 (FOR BOTH)
$99.99 (FOR JOYSTICK)
$69.99 (FOR THROTTLE)

From across the pond comes a great programmable controller setup that's a fantastic bargain.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Our first experience with a controller from Saitek came when we got our hands on the AceMaster 18. It was a pretty cheesy-looking stick, with its huge, red buttons, videogame-style auto-fire, and weird, kidney-shaped base. But wait! The textured grip was really comfortable, the spring tension was just right, and the oversized throttle slider moved so smoothly we thought it must be attached to some complex hydraulic system.

The AceMaster 18 turned out to be a really good controller hiding in a very unlikely package, and we learned not to underestimate a certain UK joystick manufacturer. Still, no one was expecting Saitek's next offering to be as terrific as the X36 Flight Control System turned out to be.

The X36 system consists of a joystick — the X36F — and a throttle/rudder controller — the X35T. It'd be almost impossible to write a coherent paragraph that listed all the features of both stick and throttle, so let's just tick 'em off in a nice, inelegant list. The X36F joystick has:

- Six buttons, all programmable; in addition, any four of those buttons can be configured to work as any of the four traditional joystick buttons, and the pinky button can be used as a "shift" function, letting each of the other buttons perform two different tasks.
- Two hat switches, both of which are programmable.
- Built-in commands for *Microsoft Flight Simulator*.
- The ability to emulate a CH Products Flight Stick Pro or F-16 Combat Stick.

And the X35T throttle has:

- A smooth throttle control that can work as the up-down axis of Joystick 2 (the traditional throttle function); can be programmed incrementally, issuing one command when pushed forward and another when pulled back; or be programmed in "bands," issuing a different command at any number of positions as it is moved forward or backward. That means you can accommodate games that use the plus and minus keys or the numeric keys for throttle control just as easily as games that support the traditional analog throttle.
- An analog rudder rocker built into the grip, which can work as the left-right axis of Joystick 2 (the traditional rudder function) or be programmed incrementally or in bands, just like the throttle.
- Two rotary knobs that can be programmed incrementally or in bands.
- Two hat switches — both are programmable, and one can be used to emulate a mouse.
- Two buttons, both programmable.
- Two programmable three-position switches, one of which can be used as a mode switch, letting you program three different functions into every other button and hat switch on both the joystick and throttle.

That's a helluva lot of control. Of course, if you have any experience with programmable controllers, you're probably thinking such a full-featured stick and throttle setup just has to be difficult to program. If you have visions of spending hours typing up complex text files full of arcane commands like "THR 1 32 1 = - BSP BSP" (that's a real command, straight out of a configuration file for Thrustmaster's TQS throttle), you can relax — programming the X36 system is simplicity itself.

The programmable X36 joystick and throttle look sharp and feel great.

It starts with a friendly, Windows-based application that makes programming the stick and throttle a point-and-click proposition. Click the mouse on the trigger in an on-screen picture of the joystick, and a dialog box for programming the trigger appears. Even simpler, you can just grab the stick or throttle and push the button, switch, or knob you want to program — its associated dialog box pops up automatically. An automatic editing mode means you don't have to remember abbreviations like "SHF" for "Shift" or "KPD" for "keypad" — you just hit the same key combinations you'd use in the game you're programming the controllers for, and the program translates for you.

When you're finished, you save your configuration and exit the X36 program, ready to play your game in Windows or DOS. Before it closes, a dialog box tells you what configuration is currently loaded in the stick and throttle and lets you load another program if you want. You can even designate a program to be loaded automatically when Windows starts up.

The X36 system's functionality and ease of use would be enough to recommend it, but this also happens to be a well-made, great-looking pair of controllers. They're big, sturdy, and comfortable to use for extended gaming sessions. Best of all is the price: $149 is the suggested retail for both. Compare that to $199.95 *each* for Thrustmaster's comparable F-16 FLCS stick and TQS throttle, and you're looking at a stunning bargain. If you're in the market for a serious sim setup that's easy to use, the X36 stick and throttle belong on a very short list of contenders.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Loads of programmable buttons, knobs, and sliders; sturdy, comfortable; easy to program.

LOWS: Joystick's button configuration in CH emulation mode is a little awkward; could've used better documentation.

BOTTOM LINE: With its balance of functionality and low cost, the X36 combo may well be the best buy going in high-end PC controllers.

CLONING SHEEP
DON'T MEAN JACK.

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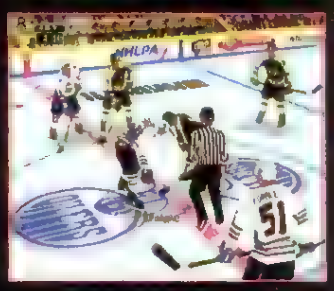
WE CLONED THE DOMINATOR.

NHL POWERPLAY 98



While pretty close to a gosh-darn miracle, Dolly — that cloned sheep — really doesn't understand the nuances of the butterfly style. In fact, she's a lot like those other hockey games — the ones where all the little computer guys play the same. Claude Lemieux doesn't check like Brind'Amour in real life, and he doesn't in NHL Powerplay™ '98 either. Our Patrick Roy doesn't make glove saves like the Dominator, and you'll have a tough time beating our Beezer through the five hole. We use the actual styles and abilities of guys like Fedorov, Shanahan, Leetch and every other player in the NHL to deliver the most realistic hockey game ever created. It's real skating, real physics and real action — and it's a helluva lot cooler than cloning sheep. www.vie.com

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Cambridge SoundWorks PCWorks

PC GAMER CHOICE

Company: Cambridge SoundWorks
www.hifi.com

Phone: (800) 367-4434 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $99

Cambridge SoundWorks has established itself as a maker of high quality speaker systems. The SoundWorks and MicroWorks systems, with their distinctive, tiny satellite speakers cubes and excellent subwoofers, deliver startling range and incredible clarity.

Now the cubes have gotten smaller — and cheaper. Fresh from a distribution deal with Creative Labs, Cambridge has introduced PCWorks, a kind of miniature version of the other two sets The PCWorks is similar to its predecessors: Two satellite cubes sit on the desktop, connected to a powered subwoofer. The sub has its own control for bass level, and a small master volume control connected to the subwoofer via its own wire can be connected anywhere

The PCWorks cubes contain 3" speakers, driven by 3.5 watts each. On their own, they deliver excellent treble and midrange response, and with the 10-watt subwoofer handling low frequencies, this system sounds better than some speakers that sell for twice the price. With the subwoofer simply positioned under the desk in the open, low-range response can be a little weak, but place it near a wall as suggested in the manual, and the bass becomes very solid. It doesn't get extremely loud, but its output is more than adequate for a desktop system.

The only area in which this system comes up short is in its controls; as with all Cambridge multimedia systems, the only controls you're offered are master volume and bass level: there's no option to tweak balance and tone control. This is a very minor gripe, though, since the PCWorks system sounds so terrific out of the box, and Windows 95 and most sound cards' software give you control over those elements. Another little complaint: although PCWorks is very easy to set up and use, little is offered in the way of technical support. One page in the manual is headed "Difficulty?" and a paragraph beneath it tells you to contact the retailer where the system was purchased.

Don't be tricked by those little cubes; they pack *big* sound.

But these gripes are barely noteworthy, and they don't take away from the fact that the Cambridge SoundWorks PCWorks packs amazing performance at its price. If you're looking for a low-priced speaker system with high-end sound, this is it.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Nearly as good as Cambridge's other fantastic multimedia speakers — only smaller and less expensive.

LOWS: No tech support; relatively low power.

BOTTOM LINE: Cambridge SoundWorks has broken a price/performance barrier with the PCWorks. This is an excellent system for the audiophile on a budget.

Suncom G-Force Plus

Company: Suncom G-Force Plus
www.suncominc.com

Phone: (847) 229-0002 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $49.99

An otherwise nice controller, the Suncom G-Force Plus suffers from some poor design elements.

Let's get this straight: With the current boom of force feedback-equipped flight yokes and driving wheels, the name of Suncom's multi-use controller may be misleading. The G-Force Plus is *not* a force-feedback device. On the other hand, it's not very expensive, either.

What the G-Force has going for it is versatility. It can be used as a yoke for flight sims, and you can lock the vertical axis in place to use it as a driving wheel. It sets up in seconds and includes a Windows 95 joystick driver. Four buttons are situated comfortably, one beneath each forefinger and thumb; their assignments can be customized via a set of three switches. A throttle is also included, but its placement near the middle of the steering stalk is unfortunate; there's no way to hold the handles naturally and still make full use of the throttle. The G-Force can be fastened to your desk via suction cups, which don't make for a lot of stability, or with built-in clamps, the more desirable option.

But versatility is not enough to recommend this flight yoke/steering wheel combo; the problem is that it doesn't do either of its tricks very well. It's better as a flight yoke, especially for gamers who enjoy civilian sims like *Microsoft Flight Simulator* and *Flight Unlimited*. The yoke feels pretty natural in those games, but the column (the controller's up-down axis) doesn't move very smoothly and tends to jerk small distances forward or back when you're trying to make minute adjustments. This causes tricky stunt flying to be even more difficult; even simple actions that require constant, small adjustments — like straight-and-level flight — can be frustrating.

Racing with the G-Force presents its own set of problems, one being the placement of the throttle slider. Even though most racing games allow you to map the accelerator to a button or the up-down axis of a joystick, the proportional control of a well-placed throttle is far more advantageous. Another racing flaw is the fact that the wheel has a range of less than 45 degrees in either direction. Although it's an improvement over a joystick, driving still doesn't feel natural with the G-Force.

Still, in the G-Force's price range, we've seen half-baked racing wheels that amount to nothing more than a waste of plastic, and the G-Force is far above that. With a little more care in its design, this could've been a nice budget alternative to all of the high-priced wheels and yokes poised to hit the market.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Functions as both a yoke and a wheel; its low price makes it an alternative to the high-priced wheels and yokes out there.

LOWS: Inconvenient throttle placement; limited turn range; jerky vertical axis movement makes it tough to make fine adjustments.

BOTTOM LINE: This is certainly not a terrible controller, but it could have been much better.

MIDILand Speakers

Company: MIDILand
www.midiland.com

Phone: (909) 592-1168 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $79 (CRESCENDO)
$199 (CAPRICCIO)

MIDILand brings us two new sets of multimedia speakers: the high end Capriccio and its more affordable counterpart, the Crescendo.

With the possible exception of the Really Cool Mouse Pad, speakers tend to be the most neglected part of a gamer's setup. But as new sound technologies give your PC a bigger voice, new speakers that make the most of it are becoming available. It's time to take a look; MidiLand has released two speaker sets that will fit almost any gamer's budget.

THE CRESCENDO

It used to be that less than $100 would buy only a two-piece speaker set, and anyone wanting a subwoofer had to pony up big-time. With an MSRP of $79 and an estimated street price $59, the Crescendo proves that decent three-piece systems are possible. Unfortunately, it doesn't get much better than decent; design shortcomings and low power mar the clear sounds and respectable 3D audio offered by this system.

The Crescendo's speakers are short (7.25") with a small footprint. The satellite speakers don't have volume controls or a headphone jack. Two volume knobs — one for the subwoofer and one for the speakers — are located on the subwoofer itself. That means every time you want to change the volume, you have to reach under your desk — unless you keep the subwoofer on your desktop, which is hardly the ideal place for that component. If you use your PC for a variety of applications, like MIDI composition and game playing — or even if you play different games — you'll quickly notice the awkwardness of the volume control.

The Crescendo is simpler and cheaper than its higher end counterpart, but its sound isn't quite as nice.

MIDILand's high end speaker system, the Capriccio, is heavy on both cables and wattage.

The Crescendo doesn't offer any tone controls, but that's not a big problem, since these speakers offer surprisingly clean sound, with pretty good midrange and low frequencies and very crisp highs. Signal-to-noise ratio is reasonably high, which means you can crank these speakers without running into a lot of hiss. This is good, because these babies aren't very efficient; you'll *have* to crank 'em up to get much in the way of volume. And no matter how far to the right you turn the bass-level knob, the 17-watt subwoofer doesn't have the power to really get into your bones. Audiophiles who prefer tooth-rattling bass are advised to look elsewhere.

This speaker system offers decent sound, especially considering the price. The Crescendo would be an ideal speaker system for a family PC that doesn't require a lot of volume changes or a paint-peeling subwoofer. Serious gamers who have more money to spend should check out the MidiLand Capriccio.

THE CAPRICCIO

At $199 MSRP (around $150 in stores), the Capriccio system is twice the price of the Crescendo, but the difference is like night and day — or rather, the chirp of a robin and the scream of an eagle.

The Capriccio system consists of four parts: a 35-watt subwoofer, two 10-watt speakers, and a desktop "master controller." Before describing the master controller, a complaint must be made: it's much too light. It seemed like even a faint tug on one of the four cables attached to the back of the controller would send it flying off the desk. A little weight added to the controller's feet would make it much easier to work with.

That being said, the master controller has microphone in and out jacks, plus low-level (sound card) and high-level (cassette decks, CD players) inputs. Sound is extremely malleable via the controller, with a Digital Sound Processor (DSP) switch, subwoofer frequency and volume knobs, and a phase switch for synchronizing satellite and subwoofer signals. There's even an auxiliary jack for adding extra speakers. If you must be conventional, the satellite speakers have treble, bass, and volume controls in addition to a headphone jack.

Hang on to your sternum — the 55-watt maximum output is heavy on the bass. Explosions in *Shadow Warrior* rocked the walls. At the same time, the Capriccio system has a deft, responsive touch — a 20-voice MIDI composition played with each instrument distinct.

Highs, lows, and midrange audio are all faithfully reproduced in this speaker set, though with the subwoofer frequency control and all the sound control knobs, it's easy to go too far and muddy up the midrange. The 3D audio is excellent, with a lot of depth.

The maze of cables and the many sound control knobs might be overkill for those who want a simple sound solution. But gamers who aren't afraid to play with the settings and want strong bass at a good price should take a long look at the Capriccio.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: *Crescendo:* Good sound for the price; easy setup. *Capriccio:* Bone-busting bass; lots of sound control.

LOWS: *Crescendo:* Awkwardly placed volume control. *Capriccio:* Too many cables.

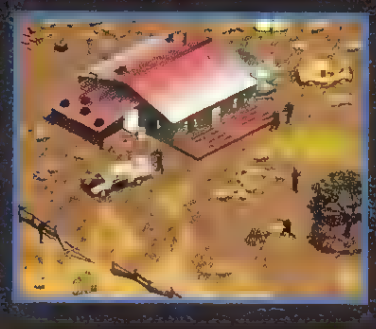
BOTTOM LINE: Budget-conscious gamers should look at Crescendo, while audiophiles may want to check out the Capriccio.

IF GUNS FAIL, BRING IN DOGS.

IF DOGS FAIL, BRING IN TEAR GAS.

IF TEAR GAS FAILS,

BRING IN HELICOPTERS.



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RP

IF HELICOPTERS FAIL.

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PSYGNOSIS

www.psygnosis.com

PC CD ROM

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Product Information Number 270

Logitech CyberMan II

Company: Logitech
www.logitech.com

Phone: (510) 795-8500 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $99

The CyberMan II is the latest six-axis controller based on NASA technology — but that doesn't make it good.

Batten down the hatches! Angry mail incoming!

Beg your pardon?

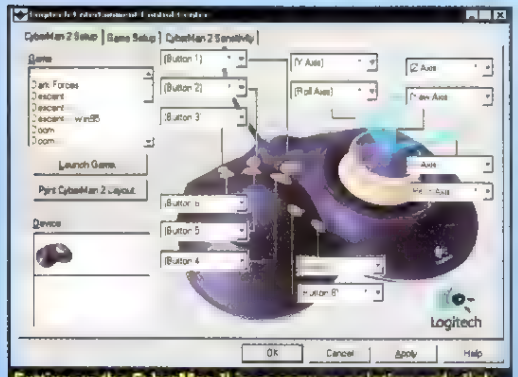
That was a warning to the rest of the *PC Gamer* staff to prepare for the outrage created by giving a six-axis controller a bad review. There will be *Quake* black-belts who swear by the CyberMan II; *Duke Nukem Forever* champs who would sooner throw themselves in front of a commuter train than play with anything else; gamers who pay a $100 for a game controller, then *force* themselves to love it — after all, it cost a hundred bucks — but the average gamer will experience more headaches than success with this odd device.

The CyberMan II is certainly unique. Its sprawling base houses eight well-placed buttons on the left-hand side and a "puck" on the right. The puck, reportedly based on technology that NASA has used to control the Space Shuttle's arm, moves along a full six axes: X and Y, the two standard forward/back and left/right joystick axes; a Z axis (straight up and down); a roll axis (tilting left and right); a pitch axis (tilt forward and back); and a yaw axis (twist).

The CyberMan II is easy to set up. You interface with it through version 2.2 of Logitech's excellent *Logitech Entertainment Software*, which makes programming this device simple and comprehensive. The CyberMan plugs into the gameport only, so it's fully DirectInput compatible; Windows 95 games can support it directly. Also, any keyboard command can be mapped to any of the CyberMan's buttons or axes. Games are launched right through the *LES* interface.

The CyberMan II is a unique, comfortable controller with a few frustrating flaws.

One of the major complaints about other "3D" controllers is that they often require a specific driver for each game they're used with. By making it completely programmable, Logitech avoided that trap door — but only partially. The most popular 3D games, including *Doom* and *Doom II*, *Quake*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Hexen*, and *Heretic* have preconfigured overlays built into a program called *Launcher* that is packaged with *LES*. The CyberMan II can be programmed for any game, but functions that do not map to axes the game recognizes must be mapped to keys, meaning that you lose proportional control over those actions. For example, if you try to play *Quake* by programming it yourself, the game will recognize the CyberMan II as a joystick and allow proportional control over the X and Y axes. Strafing, turning, and looking up and down must all be mapped to keyboard commands, and by doing that you diminish control significantly.



Setting up the CyberMan II is as easy as pointing and clicking using the *Logitech Entertainment Software* interface.

As new games come out, Logitech will offer downloadable upgrades to *Launcher* on its web site. As long as a first-person shooter is supported, you get full control without a problem — but that brings up another, more subjective complaint.

While the *LES* allows you to tweak the sensitivity of the CyberMan II, the puck only moves a few millimeters in each direction; every tiny nudge of your fingers has major impact on control of your game. With the sensitivity turned down, there's not enough control, but with it turned all the way up, it gets maddeningly twitchy. Even after several hours of play, control is difficult and precision is still a long way off. No doubt there will be sure-fingered gamers who will happily dedicate their lives to scaling the learning curve to using the CyberMan II second nature, and they will be dangerous opponents in deathmatches. Most of us, though, will lose our patience long before that and yearn to be reunited with our keyboards and mice.

The CyberMan II is not a bad piece of equipment. It's well built and ergonomic, and it works the way it was intended to. That's not the problem. The thing is, no matter how *well* it works, it's still twitchy, oversensitive, and frustrating. If you're willing to devote hours and hours to developing the reflexes you'll need to achieve oneness with this controller, go for it. If you're the average gamer who wants a controller that you can plug in and use right away, we suggest that you keep looking.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Ergonomic and well built; excellent software interface makes it very easy to program.

LOWS: Mind numbingly long learning curve; way too twitchy; specific drivers needed for full functionality in some games.

BOTTOM LINE: This controller has a very specific audience who will love it; the rest of us will prefer something easier.

Diamond GyroMouse

Company: Diamond Multimedia
www.diamondmm.com

Phone: (800) 468-5846 (TO ORDER)
(408) 325-7100 (TECH SUPPORT)

Price: $99.95

Diamond introduces a unique input device that is certainly a conversation piece; but is it useful as a mouse?

In the quest to produce a unique peripheral, there's a fine line between a truly useful product and an expensive conversation piece. Diamond's Wireless GyroMouse skirts the very edge of that razor, dangerously close to falling into the Useless Gimmick Zone™.

The sleek, two-button GyroMouse sets up in seconds, and it's totally compatible with any generic mouse driver. The package consists of two units: the mouse itself and a base station that plugs into the mouse port or serial port and is powered by an AC adapter. The mouse contains a Nickel-Cadmium battery pack that lasts as long as eight hours.

The GyroMouse can be used either on the desk or in the air. It transmits to the base unit through one of eight radio channels and is rated to work as far as 30 feet away. In our tests, it worked reliably at slightly longer ranges, but the point is sort of moot long before that: the standard onscreen mouse cursor is hard to see at half that distance, even on a 31" monitor.

The GyroMouse has a standard mouse ball on its underside for use on a mouse pad. It's mounted near the rear of the mouse, so it can be slightly awkward if you're used to having the tracking ball in the middle or near the front of the mouse, where most mice place it. The GyroMouse is also quite heavy; after using it for a while, a standard mouse starts to feel like a hollow toy. The extra weight can be a strain on the wrist throughout a day's use; if you already have carpal tunnel syndrome, watch out.

Lifting the mouse off the desk is a funky experience. Holding or double-clicking a button in the trigger position beneath the mouse sends it into gyro mode, at which point the mouse senses its movement through the air and moves the pointer accordingly. You can easily switch between on- and off-desk operation; when the mouse senses any movement of its ball, it returns to desktop mode. But this can be annoying; if your finger accidentally touches the ball when you're using the mouse off the desk, it'll suddenly stop responding to spatial movement, requiring you to double-click the trigger again.

Controlling the cursor in this fashion is awkward at first, but it gets easier with practice. The hard part comes in trying to hold the mouse steady enough to double-click small icons, such as the folders in Windows Explorer's "details" view, or to grab and drag scroll buttons in word processing or 'net surfing, or any other sort of pixel-precise operation. It's not easy to hold an object still in the air; even with mouse sensitivity turned way down, the motion sensors in the GyroMouse reacts to every minute twitch.

The Diamond Wireless GyroMouse is useful and fun to play with.

Diamond doesn't supply any mouse software at all, relying fully on Microsoft's drivers and customizing applications. It would've been nice to have some of the handy tweaks available with Logitech's *MouseWare*, such as drag-lock or single-press double-clicking.

The GyroMouse's battery lasts about eight hours, but there's no warning before it dies and your cursor freezes. If you spend long sessions in front of your computer, or if you forget to put the mouse into its charger between sessions, be sure to learn the Win 95 keyboard commands to save and close your programs, and have a standard mouse ready to use while the GyroMouse recharges. The GyroMouse does go into suspended mode if you leave it alone for 15 minutes, but the battery still drains gradually.

As a gaming controller, the GyroMouse has little to offer beyond a common mouse. Wireless operation is certainly an advantage in hectic games like *Quake*, where fiddling with an intrusive mouse cord can be the difference between getting a frag or being a victim of one.

Off the desk, however, precision becomes a major problem. Playing first persion shooters with the GyroMouse became frusterating rather quickly, and it's also a bit awkward waving the mouse through the air.

Of course, Diamond didn't intend the GyroMouse to be a gaming controller. As a hand held pointing device for casual operations such as web surfing, it's actually quite addictive. It's nice to kick back with your feet up on your desk during long, engaging Internet sessions, provided you don't have the need for a lot of typing in the process.

Overall, the Diamond Wireless GyroMouse is an interesting, unique device which is truly useful, but it could've been much better. A mouse customization program and some kind of low-battery warning would have made this a great product.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Works well on and off the desk; total wireless freedom without the need to manipulate a tiny trackball.

LOWS: Extreme sensitivity can be a nuisance in precise operations; no software; battery dies very suddenly; not great for games.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a unique, useful gadget that's fun to use.

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Tech Q&A

Is your PC misbehaving again? Tech support is no help? Put down that hammer and send the question to us!

Q I was reading your informative article on How to Build a Network and thought it was great. Since I am a WAN administrator, it's good to know you are showing people that you don't need to buy expensive equipment or devote many hours to bring a network online.

I have one problem with your article, though: you stated "If you want to network in DOS, you'll need to buy peer-to-peer network client software, such as LANtastic."

This is a false statement. The first time I did a network was in DOS 6.0, using the INTERLNK and INTERSVR commands. I had great fun and it spurred my interest in WAN/LAN administrating. I just wanted to bring this to your attention. Thank you for your time.

— Stephen Wood, via the Internet

A Thank you for your comments, Stephen! In fact, several readers have brought INTERLNK to our attention, along with more robust commercial solutions such as Laplink.

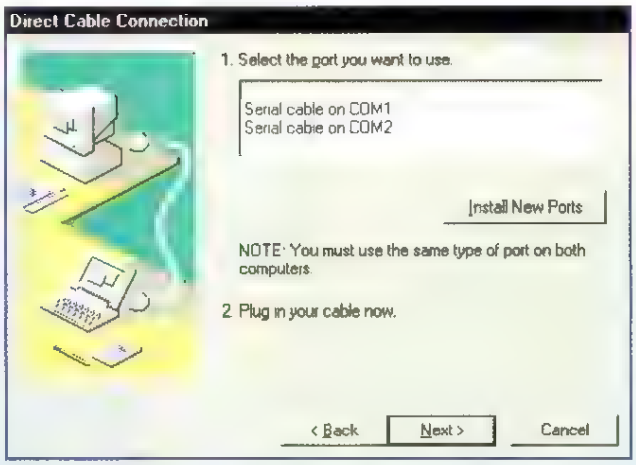
For our readers who are unfamiliar with that good old DOS app, INTERLNK was included with later versions of MS-DOS to provide a simple way to connect two computers via their serial or parallel ports for the purpose of transferring data between the two. The most common INTERLNK users are folks who work on both a laptop PC and a desktop computer, with the frequent need to share files between them. Windows 95 has its own souped-up version of INTERLNK, creatively named Direct Cable Connection.

In terms of gaming, though, INTERLNK is basically useless. We covered null-modem connections in the networking article and, for the most part, once the physical connection between two computers is made, games' multi-player setup routines take care of the rest.

Although an INTERLNK-type connection can provide some network functionality, in itself it does not constitute a network client for several reasons:

- Only two computers can be connected via INTERLNK.
- Even through a parallel connection, INTERLNK does not provide a fraction of the speed of a network.
- INTERLNK uses a basic, serial protocol and does not support popular routing protocols like IPX or NetBEUI.
- INTERLNK is not capable of basic LAN functions like device sharing (other than drives) and supporting E-mail and chat programs.

An IPX- or NetBIOS-compatible network, which gamers will need if a null modem connection is insufficient for their situation, requires the use of client software — or at least the Novell drivers included with some network interface cards. INTERLNK is a handy little program, but it's not a substitute for LAN software.


Direct Cable Connection
1. Select the port you want to use.
Serial cable on COM1
Serial cable on COM2
Install New Ports
NOTE: You must use the same type of port on both computers.
2. Plug in your cable now.
< Back
Next >
Cancel

Windows 95's version of InterLNK is called Direct Cable Connection.

Q My computer has really been freaking me out the last few times I've turned it on. You see, I'm hearing voices coming out of my speakers! It's really weird and unfortunately I can't understand them. After a few seconds they're gone. When I turn the volume up the background overpowers them. I haven't done anything to my hardware and I've only installed a few demos. What on Earth is going on?!? I think it may be air traffic control or some truckers. But I don't live near an airport!

— Adam Law, via the Internet

A Hmm... voices, eh? Are you sure you need *technical* help? Our advice would be to heed *their* advice; if you listen close, you'll begin to make them out: "Adam...*Adam*...send huge amounts of money in a check made out to *PC Gamer*...."

Seriously, the problem could stem from a number of things. Your speakers might not be properly shielded, which can cause them to pick up radio signals. Maybe a local radio station boosted its signal, or a neighbor set up a HAM or short-wave radio. It could even be that atmospheric conditions have changed enough to bounce signals from some unknown source closer to your home.

The fix? If possible, move your computer to another part of your dwelling and see if the noise persists. If your speakers were inexpensive, you may want to invest in some better ones. All quality speakers are magnetically shielded to prevent unwanted signal reception (and to keep their magnets from damaging your floppy disks or hard drive or distorting your monitor's display).

Q I recently bought a new computer a few months ago that was supposed to have everything on it I needed to play any game. When I brought it home, I installed *Lords of the Realm II*, and when I played I didn't get sound. After that, I tried lots of different Win 95 games, but didn't get sound. Then, as I was looking at stuff on my computer one day, I noticed I didn't have a Sound Blaster sound card. I called tech support and they said that my sound card wasn't compatible with DirectX 3.0. Is there any way to fix this without buying a new sound card?

— Jonathan Dane, via the Internet

A This is part of the reason we canceled plans for a monthly column titled "Why Our Readers Love DirectX." The fact is, Microsoft claims they've worked with nearly every hardware manufac-

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If you have a hardware question or comment, write to us at:
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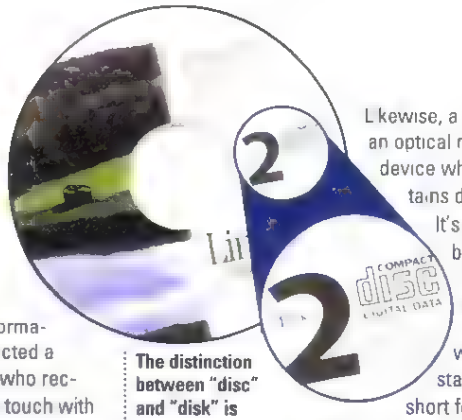


The distinction between "disc" and "disk" is becoming increasingly blurred.

turer in the world to ensure DirectX compatibility in as many components of as many computers as possible. Since you didn't mention what brand your sound card turned out to be, we can't give you specific information about it, but we contacted a Microsoft representative, who recommended that you get in touch with your computer dealer again to find out if they have any plans to try to become DirectX-compliant; there may be new drivers for your sound card that will bring it into line with gaming's New World Order. Also, contact Microsoft or hit their web site (*www.microsoft.com*) to see if you can find any information about your sound card.

If it turns out to be incompatible without any hope of change, your only option is to replace the card.

Q **This question may seem trivial, but it's been bugging us for years. Is there any criterion for the proper spelling of the word "disk?" It often appears spelled "disc," and there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason as to when it's spelled which way. Can you clear this up?**

— Shawn and Bill Carstens, Lombard, IL

A Good question! There actually are, or at least were, rules for which version of *disk/disc* is correct, but they're largely ignored. A *disc* is a flat, round object. A hard *disc* is a flat, round, magnetic storage device. A hard *disc* drive is the little thing in your computer that stores all of your data on some metal *discs* that spin around inside it.

Likewise, a compact *disc* is an optical media storage device which usually contains data or music. It's being replaced by DVD, another *disc*-based standard. And the word *disk?* It started life as a short form of the word *diskette*, which, as you know, is a magnetic media device which stores data on the floppy, plastic *disc* it contains. These days, *disc* seems to be used exclusively in reference to CDs and DVDs, while *disk* is used to refer to floppies and hard drives.

Q **I had a weird experience, and I wonder if you can explain it. I installed a game through Windows 95, but it didn't work properly. I wanted to delete it and install it through DOS, but I forgot which directory I installed it in. I figured that since it was the only thing I installed that day, I could go to Find Files, and search by date, and delete every file that was created that day.**

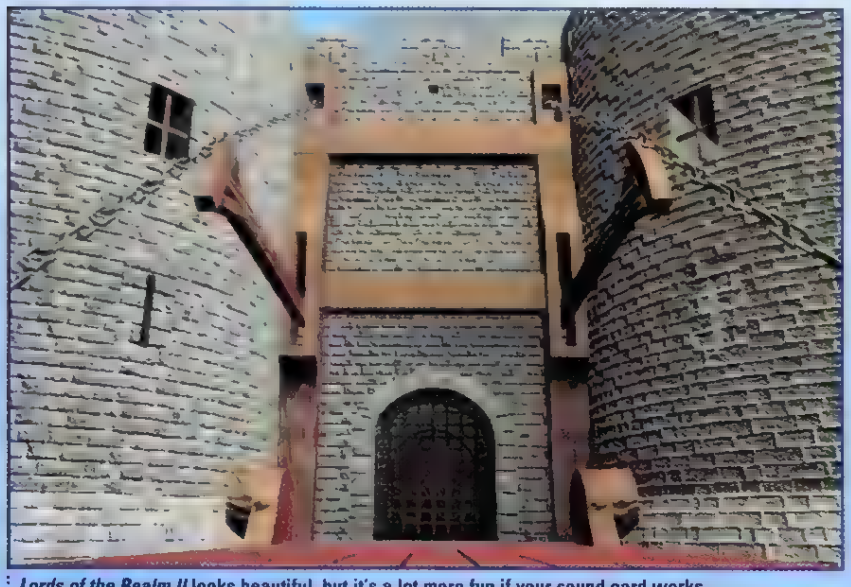
I sure was surprised when I rebooted and got a Windows Protection Error! A friend helped me boot into "Safe Mode" and restore the files from the recycle bin, so my computer is okay. What did I do?!?

— Mike Weisenthal, Cincinnati, OH

A It was impossible not to wince while reading your letter, Mike. That certainly was an interesting, and *seemingly* logical, way to get rid of those files. Why didn't it work?

Even if you haven't modified a single file all day before you search for files modified in the last 24 hours, several will still turn up. The most important of those files are SYSTEM.INI, USER.DAT and SYSTEM.DAT. The first one is a carry over from Windows 3.1, and it's used mainly for backward compatibility; the other two comprise the Windows 95 system registry. Together, these three files store a wealth of information about your computer system and its components. When you boot up your PC, they tell Windows everything it needs to know to talk to the machine, such as hardware and driver information, locations and versions of program files, configuration data, and so on. Without these files, Windows has no idea how to communicate with the PC it's installed on. Because the files are updated and overwritten each time Windows is booted up, they will always appear as recently modified files.

In case they somehow become corrupt, USER.DAT and SYSTEM.DAT are backed up with the file extensions .DA0. This, however, is also done at boot up, right after the registry files are updated...so when you deleted all of the day's files, you not only deleted the registry, but you wiped out its backup, too. Gotta love that recycle bin!



Lords of the Realm II **looks beautiful, but it's a lot more fun if your sound card works...**

Glossary

clusters
units of space on a hard drive, assigned by the computer's operating system. Data is stored in clusters, which are referred to by a numerical designation assigned by the OS. Some operating systems (such as MS-DOS and Windows 95) allocate a minimum cluster size based on the size of the hard drive partition. This can result in inefficient use of hard-drive space: if the minimum cluster size is 32K, files smaller 32K will still take up one full cluster, resulting in wasted space — which is why your 1GB hard drive doesn't quite hold a full gigabyte of data.

hot docking
a Plug-and-Play standard that allows Windows 95 and later operating systems to detect and load drivers for a device which can be added to a bus without powering the system down.

HTML
Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to create and edit web sites on the World Wide Web, increasingly finding use in non-Internet applications.

IEEE 1394 Bus
IEEE, or "I-triple-E," stands for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, which is an international organization. Among other things, they develop standards for various electrical or electronic devices to ensure compatibility between different brands. The 1394 bus is a standard of connectivity that allows electronic devices like VCRs or stereo components to be controlled by a computer equipped with a 1394 bus controller.

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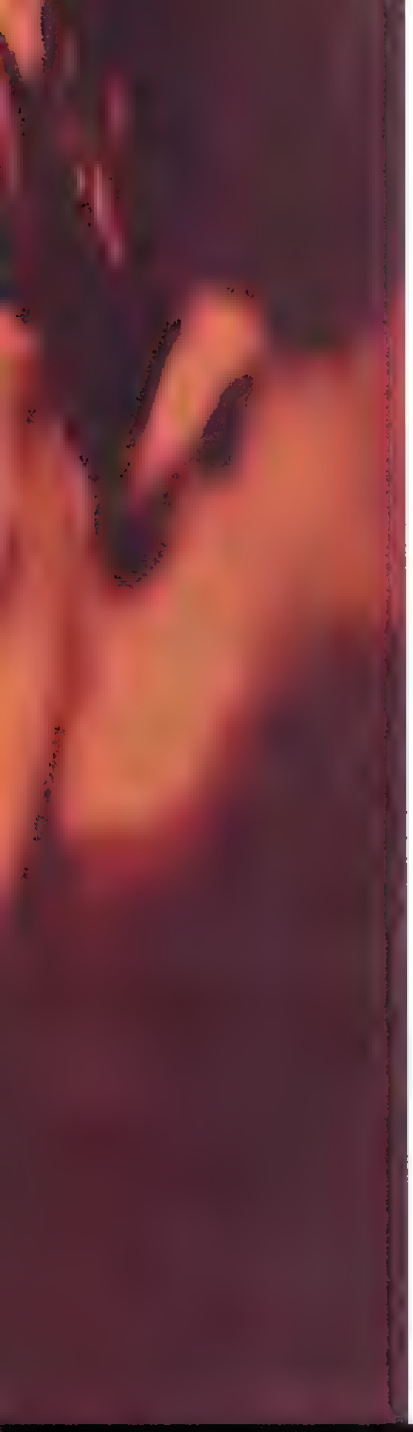

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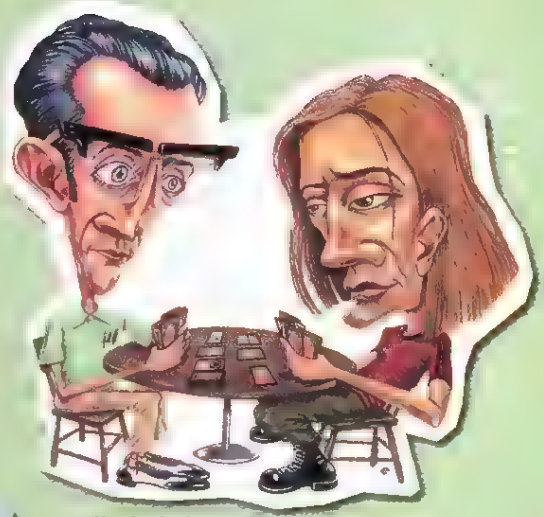

Magic brings divergent groups together in the spirit of competition. Group hug everybody!

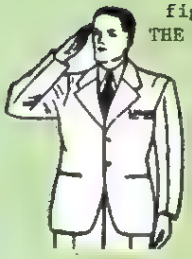

fig. 3a
THE SALUTE

fig. 3b
THE MAGIC SALUTE

fig. 1a
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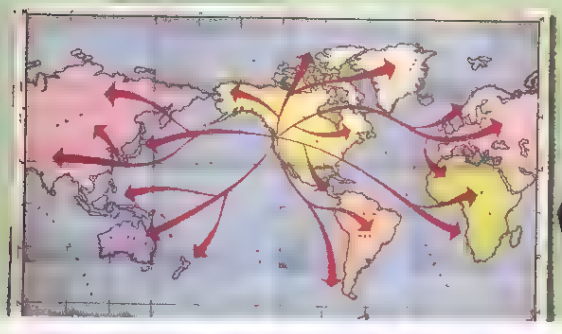

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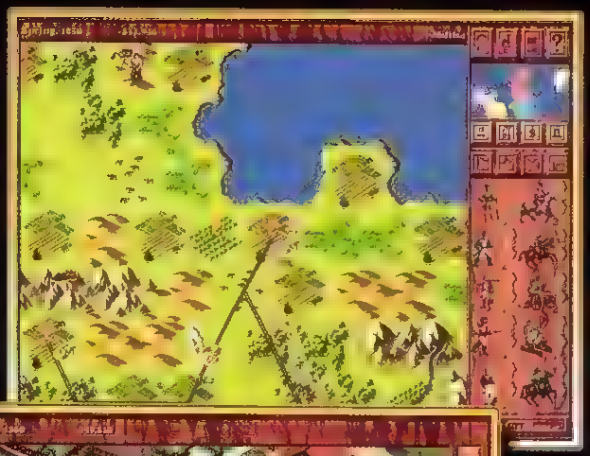

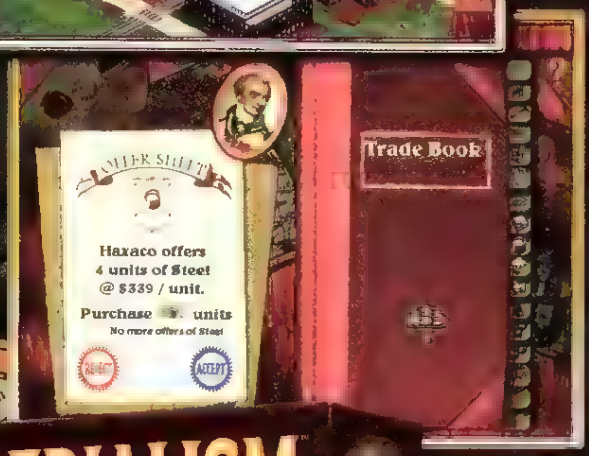

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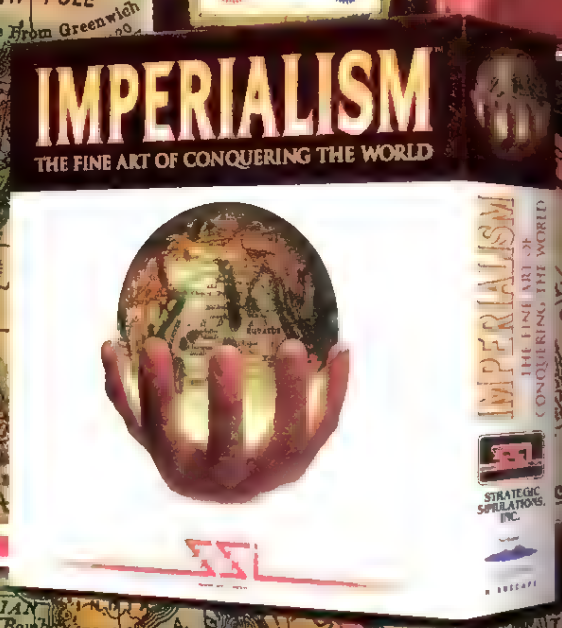

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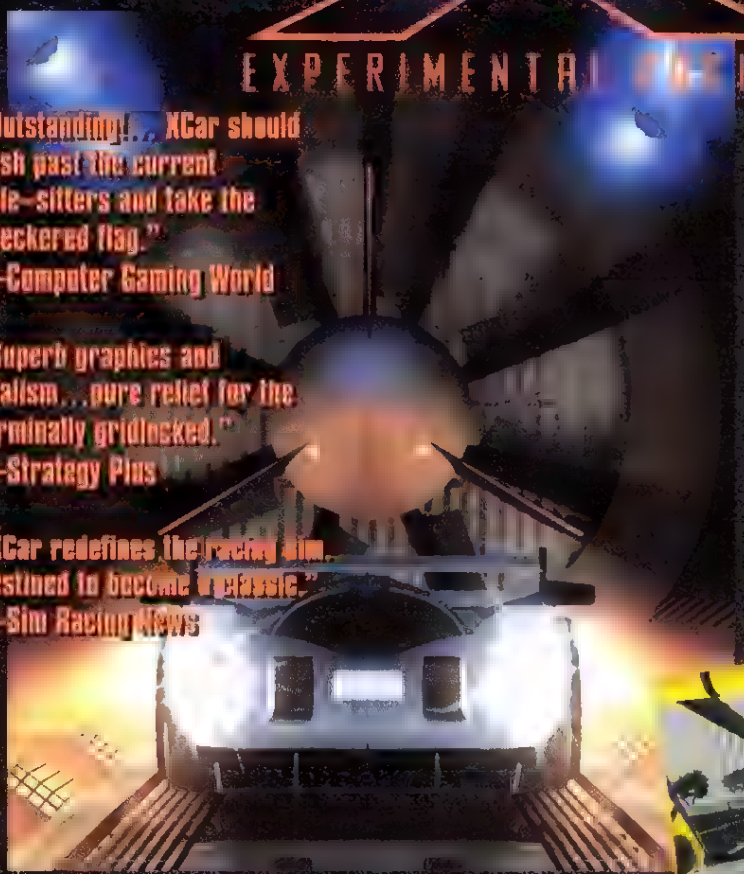

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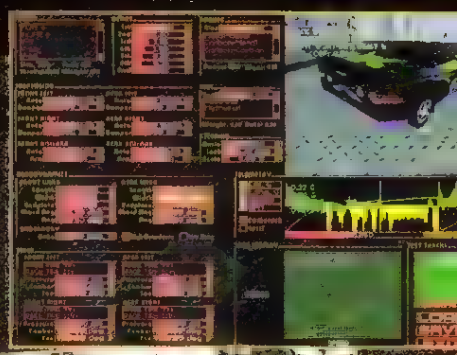

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Heroes, Ho!

Most strategy game add-on discs give you more of the same more battles, new campaigns, sometimes a few new units. This is fine, since more of the same is what makes for extended play. Rarely do they fundamentally change the gameplay or strategies involved in the original game. But both the *Heroes of Might and Magic II Expansion Pack, The Price of Loyalty* and the *Lords of the Realm II Siege Pack* do just that: their additions, while not substantial game revisions, do change the way you play these games by adding some good new twists.

HOMM2: The Price of Loyalty, created by Cyberlore studios (who brought us the *WarCraft II* set, *Beyond the Dark Portal*), is the better of the two. It's a pretty extensive expansion of the original game, which breaks down this way: two full campaigns, two small campaigns, 30 maps, 16 new artifacts, ten new heroes, ten new locations, one new structure, and a few gameplay tweaks.

The two long campaigns — "The Price of Loyalty" and "Descendants" — are made up of eight branching scenarios each, and involve, respectively, a quest for an ancient artifact and the subjugation of neighboring kingdoms. The two smaller campaigns comprise only four missions each. The structure of these new campaigns is interesting, in "The Voyage Home," for instance, you begin as a traveler washed up on a magical island, and must first conquer a town, then build a ship to sail back home. "Descendants" is almost like a generational saga, as you guide your clan along from year to year.

Almost all of the stand alone maps have something interesting to offer, and some, like "Hail, Unicorns," are pretty sharp. None is insanely difficult, but there's a good mix of easy, medium, and hard scenarios.

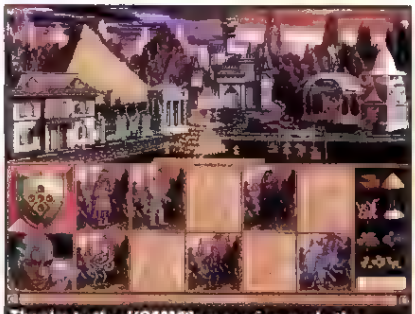
The additions to the game system itself help give these campaigns and scenarios a different feel. The most notable change lies in the out-of-town recruitment areas, which can drastically alter the feel of gameplay. At Barrow Mounds, you can recruit ghosts, while at Elemental Summoning Altars (one of each for air, earth, water, and fire), you can hire elementals.

And a hero confined to a jail will join the side of the first person to free him.

Other new locations include the Alchemist's Tower, which lets you destroy cursed items; barriers locked by secret passwords found elsewhere on the map; stables, to increase movement, and several other places that give bonuses. The one new building is the Evil Shrine (replacing the Tavern), which increases the number of skeletons resurrected after a battle. The artifacts are a mixed bag, with some power ups like the Arm of the Martyr (+3 power) and Breastplate of Anduran (+5 defense). Interestingly, several artifacts have both good and bad aspects: the Brooch of Shielding halves damage from screen spells, but costs -2 in power.

The graphics are mixed: structures and heroes look good, but artifact illustrations are fairly mediocre. There's also one little glitch pointed out on Phil McCrumm's detailed *HOMM2* Page (now at *www.astralwizard.com*): many of the sphinx in the new scenarios were not given riddles! The map editor works with all the new objects, but you need the add on disc to actually play maps made with these new objects. When saving, you have a choice to export as an old style map or an expansion map, which will help sorting out new maps online.

The Price of Loyalty comes with enough new and truly unique — elements



Thanks to the *HOMM2* expansion pack, the Necromancer can now build an Evil Shrine (instead of a Tavern), which will help resurrect more skeletons.

to make it a sure value for any fan of this game. The *Lords of the Realm II Siege Pack* also has a lot to offer the *LORII* player, but it's not nearly the expansion of gameplay the *HOMM2* offers. Sierra, working with David Lester and Impressions, has created a nice little set of mini-battles in the *Siege Pack*. If you ever wanted to just fight without playing the full strategic game, then this will definitely fit the bill.

The *Siege Pack* comes with three sets of real-time battles, matched encounters, uneven encounters, and full-blown castle sieges. There are 35 new battlefield maps altogether, and each can be played as either attacker or defender. Although a default army is set for each battle, you can customize each skirmish to include whatever units you like. (A good thing, since many starting armies are poorly configured!) Several new castle designs are featured in the siege maps, and you can edit battle maps to create whatever

Burning oil rains down on attackers in one of the more impressive new features of the *Lords of the Realm II Siege Pack*.

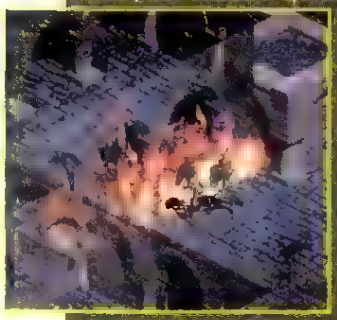
BUG PATCHES*

Ardennes Offensive CD-ROM Fix (SSI): Allows you to use CD-ROMs with drive letters higher than "H." *iso.exe*

Battleground: Gettysburg v.1.32 (TalonSoft): Fixes "hasta-off" highlighting bug, AI reporting bug when artillery is limbered, melee bug that resulted in double losses for the defending unit, and various crashes. Changes leader losses in an automatic-victory melee from "Killed" to "Captured." Makes minor adjustments to unit strengths in several scenarios in the Gettysburg and Little Round Top modules. *bgg_132.zip*

Broken Alliance v.1.02 (HPS): Fixes small bugs and makes numerous changes to the weapons database. *ba_102.zip*

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon v.1.01 (Legend): Corrects the tattoo parlor animation "sparkle" and the "dead-end" when talking to the Gypsy in Transylvania, and adds specific "handling" to the extras in the bar. *ccs101.exe*



Diablo v.1.04 (Blizzard): Prevents invalid players from interacting with other players and invalid packets from crashing players. Fixes the Hidden Shrine freeze, the Black Death crash (which occurred when fighting the monsters with an active Mana Shield and Full Health), and the functionality of the Rogue's Disarm Trap skill. *diablo.zip*

Dragons in the Mist v.1.01 (HPS): Fixes small bugs and makes numerous changes to the weapons database. *dm_101.zip*

Grand Prix Manager II v.1.02 (MicroProse): The read-me file for this patch claims that "Every line of program code has been upgraded to make it a fast, streamlined, 32-bit application." Okay, if you say so. The race section is much faster, multi-player games are more stable, and DirectPlay support has been added. *gpm2.zip*

Jetfighter III Alpha Version 2 3Dfx/MMX Upgrade (Mission Studios): A test version of a graphics acceleration patch. *jf33dfx2.zip*

Magic: The Gathering v.1.25 (MicroProse): Dozens of AI and card-specific changes have been made for this version. The computer also now plays faster, the win/loss record in the Status screen now continues past 100 entries, and crashes and palette shifts have been corrected. Caution: This will *not* work with any previous save games. *mtgv125.zip*

Panthers in the Shadows v.1.21 (HPS): Fixes small bugs and makes numerous changes to the weapons database. *ps_121.zip*

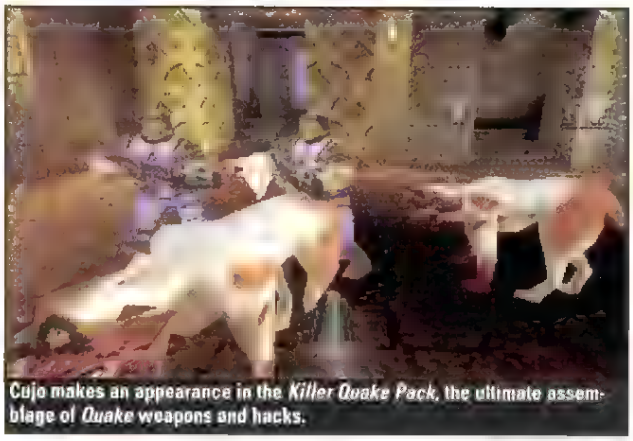
Shanghai Great Moments v.2.02 (Activision): Eliminates a problem with decompressing tile sets on hard drives larger than 1.6GB. *shgmv202.exe*

Steel Panthers II v.1.01a (SSI): Fixes for the "China War" campaign and the "Rolling on the River" scenario. *sp2v101a.zip*

Tigers on the Prowl II v.2.06 (HPS): Fixes small bugs and makes numerous changes to the weapons database. *top_206.zip*

Yoda Stories Update (LucasArts): Fixes problems related to various zones. *yopatch5.zip*

*YOU'LL FIND ALL OF THESE PATCHES ON THE CD!



Cujo makes an appearance in the *Killer Quake Pack*, the ultimate assemblage of *Quake* weapons and hacks.

kind of scenario you want.

A completely new campaign game is also included along with about 20 new realm maps. Internet play has been made faster and more stable and some adjustments to the AI make for more aggressive opponents (something sorely needed). There are still some disappointments; although there are new and interesting castle designs in the battle map section, they haven't been carried over to the campaign game, and custom castle creation is still absent. You cannot create castles in the battle map utility, or even place castles to make a siege scenario. I also experienced some instability and color shifts in the editor.

The new campaign and skirmish maps, along with the editor, make this an interesting package, but one that could have gone further. With a retail price of almost $30, it would be reasonable to expect a little more: a better editor, a few animations, maybe some new units. It's a good package, but the value could have been stronger.

On the Web

The X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter Webpage Evan Sabatelli has created a utility that makes *XvT* missions. I haven't had a chance to use the program or any of the scenarios created with it, but I hope to address them in the next issue. For now, several dozen scenarios and the builder software can be found at *www.dragonfire.net/~ESab/xvt/*

Neptune's 688(I) Hunter Killer Page This is the first *688(I)* page up, with a good design, downloadable scenarios, a timeline, tech specs, mailing list, and other great info. Despite the music (note to webmasters: music, even Holst, is not a good thing), this looks like it could be the place for *688(I)* info. Check it out at *necrom.simplenet.com/688/688index.html*

Killer Quake Pack This is a massive uber-hack for *Quake*, incorporating the best weapons and 'bots into one slick patch. It's the best one-stop solution for *Quake* mods. Try it out at *kqp.mpog.com/kqp/*

Civ II Scenarios You'll find some good *CII* scenarios from Bryan Caplan and Matthew Schwartz at *www.princeton.edu/~bacaplan/civ2.htm*

Duke Nukem 3D Penthouse Level This was a sore disappointment, there's not even much T&A, and level design is poor. If you *must* have it, it can be found at *www.apogee1.com/*

X-Commander's Guild A good *X-COM: Apocalypse* site, with tips, cheats, news, unit info, etc. is at *www.gametemple.com/x-com/*

The 666th Tactical Fighter Wing This is an *EF2000* page with training, hints, and several missions and utilities, located at *www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/8324/wing.html*

Age of Rifles The Klemme brothers have created some great new *AOR* scenarios that bear downloading, including a huge Gettysburg and Chickamauga, some Napoleonic, Maori, and others. Always a good site for *AOR* scenarios: *ezinfo.ucs.indiana.edu/~dklemme/rifles.htm*.

Steel Panthers II There's a large but somewhat unstable site full of *SP* scenarios at *ally.ios.com/~oh2dogs9/steel.html*

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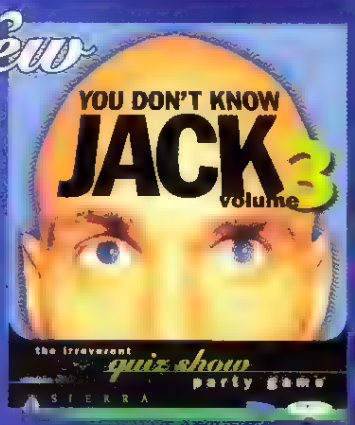
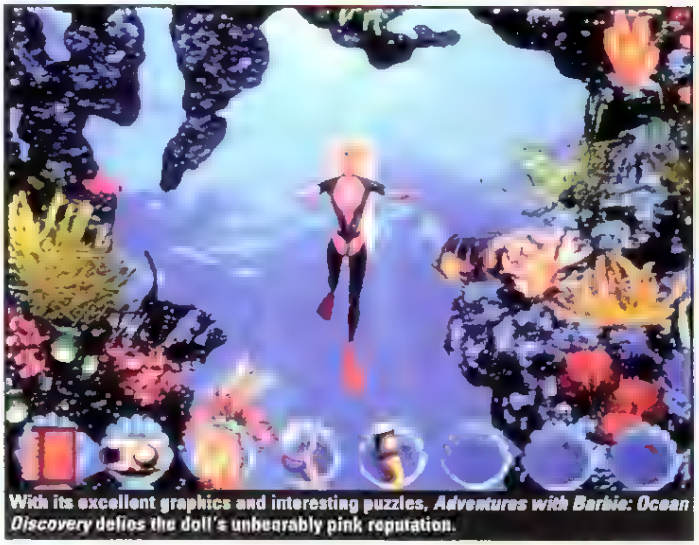


Product Information Number 106

Shifting Landscapes


With its excellent graphics and interesting puzzles, *Adventures with Barbie: Ocean Discovery* defies the doll's unbearably pink reputation.

Heidi E. H. Aycock

During the year, I wander through a landscape of educational software using what I know to evaluate what I see — a pleasant pond here, some beautiful woods nearby, a lovely hill in the distance. This past summer, my view changed when E3 (the Electronic Entertainment Expo) visited its furies upon Atlanta, Georgia's within spitting distance of my home — for an augmented life form, anyway. I'm a little more ordinary, so I had to book a flight.

At E3, it was as though I had strapped on a pair of rental wings and could observe the landscape from above. Those randomly scattered bodies of water stretched into one long river; those small stands of trees merged into a large forest, and those peppered hills joined as the piedmont of a mountain range. Trends — the features of the educational software landscape clarified into a map of the market's future. Some of the features qualify as natural wonders, others as the armpit of the region. From high above the show, I saw more in three days of E3 hype than I could see in 365 days at home.

Girls' Software

From my new vantage point I watched the river of girl's software flow through the E3 booths, cutting a gentle path through the battle games, the sports simulations, and the sociopathic nightmares.

My first E3 appointment was a dream date with Mattel's hottest product. I've never liked Barbie, so most of the software was too perky and pink for my tastes. However, *Adventures with Barbie: Ocean Discovery* for ages five and older, impressed me with excellent graphics, interesting puzzles, and a fine plot. This Barbie sets a good example for girls, and she looks like great fun. I just wish the little beauty babe would gain a little weight or sprout a pimple.

From Barbie-pink, I set my course for Purple Moon, a company that understands the significance of a pimple. Watch for this new company's Rockett and Secret Paths series, for girls eight to 12 years old. To develop the programs, the staff at Purple Moon conducted research on what girls like, how they play, and what they want to do on the computer. The software's unusual style and themes reflect the research, and the results looked tempting at E3. The Rockett series is set in junior high school, but it should appeal to a younger girl's penchant for imagining herself to be older. The Secret Paths series features younger characters and more internal, psychological themes. Both series aim to communicate respect for the real lives of real girls.

Other girl-oriented packages fed into the river, creating a strong, compelling current. At the IBM booth, *Crayola's Magic Wardrobe* splashed in like a playful waterfall. Designed for children 6 to 12 years old, this software combines paper doll play with women's history, wrapping the lessons in imaginative play and creativity. From The Learning Company, *American Girls Premiere* curtseyed gracefully before eddying along. The software allows children to produce their own plays starring quaint and clever American Girls characters. Creative Wonders will release a new version of *The Baby Sitters Club* (which I liked in its first incarnation) for kids seven and older as well as new, academically-oriented packages in the Madeline series for kids. One package will cover preschool and kindergarten topics, the other will cover first grade and second grade.

I am encouraged by the ardor with which software companies are pursuing girls, but I wish products didn't have to blush pink to do it. Designing more inclusive software would suit me better — software that assumes that a girl hero is as convincing as a boy hero, that a boy artist is as creative as a girl artist, and that anyone can enjoy a quiet pursuit. At the very least, I wish companies would package boy-oriented versions of these girl-oriented packages; it would be a nice foil for the violent software currently dominating the market.

A trip to the Electronic Entertainment Expo is like a bird's-eye view of the industry. Heidi got the lay of the land in Atlanta.

Creativity Software

Fed by the waters of the girls software river, a forest of creativity has flourished along the banks. At one level, this new wave of creativity software and creativity

In *Crayola's Magic Wardrobe*, children can learn about various historic periods through paper doll clothes, props, journals, and other information.

modules is driven by the quest to attract girls to the software market. Many software producers believe that girls most love to create things — written things, drawn things, and such. So they stuff these tools into software as a kind of wink at our daughters. Thank goodness, our sons get the nod too. *Crayola's Print Factory*, Disney's Print Studio series, and many more graphics packages know no gender boundaries, and Matte.'s *Hot Wheels Custom Designer* CD ROM shuffles like a shy but endearing school boy next to *Barbie Party Print 'n Play*. Most of these programs will appeal to broad age ranges.

At another level, this new wave of creativity software and creativity modules is driven by the new wave of cheap, high-quality printers and by the new line of printing forms and paper from companies like Avery Dennison and Hewlett Packard. For about $300, you can buy a printer that outputs photographs nearly as well as your favorite film developer can. With a powerful package like *Live Pix* or Creative Wonders' *Picture Creations: All in One Studio*, you or your children can print photographs even *better*, because you can eliminate red eye, adjust contrast, and crop the pictures as you please. With the new breed of printing media, you can print these photos and many other images on stickers, postcards, iron-on transfer sheets, business cards, and so on. Many kids' packages boast the ability to print on Avery's products, but *Print Paks* boasts its independence from paper companies with its fascinating jewelry kits, magnet kits, and other cool packages.

Take Out Windows

The final big trend struck me like an earthquake shaping the low dales into wrinkled mountains, the take-out trend. Just about every other kids' software package boasted that its activities encouraged children to continue their projects off the computer. For example, Hasbro's *Mr. Potato Head* and *Tonka Trucks* packages encourage kids to print new facial features for the anthropomorphic tuber and new building materials for the monster trucks. Kids cut these out and use them while their parents log on to the Internet or type a letter — but still the computer is at the root of their play.

Mattel's Barbie line offered the most dramatic example of this trend. This winter, watch for *Talk with Me Barbie Doll*, the queen of take-out software. Through a clever interface and CD ROM, Barbie interviews your child, gathering information about special interests, favorite games, and so on. Then, wherever your child takes the 11" chatterbox, Barbie can carry on an appropriate conversation. They can play school together, talk about careers, or chat about dating. Barbie uses your child's name and knows her birthday. Eeriest of all, Barbie's lips move while she talks. For kids five and older who love Barbie, this is a no-brainer. She's about as superfluous as a pony, but a lot more affordable. For kids who don't love Barbie, though, look out. The doll might find herself prepped for exploratory surgery; some kids will want to figure out how the darn thing works. Now *there's* a take-out angle I didn't see at E3 — not at the educational booths, anyway.

Another Day, Another Trend

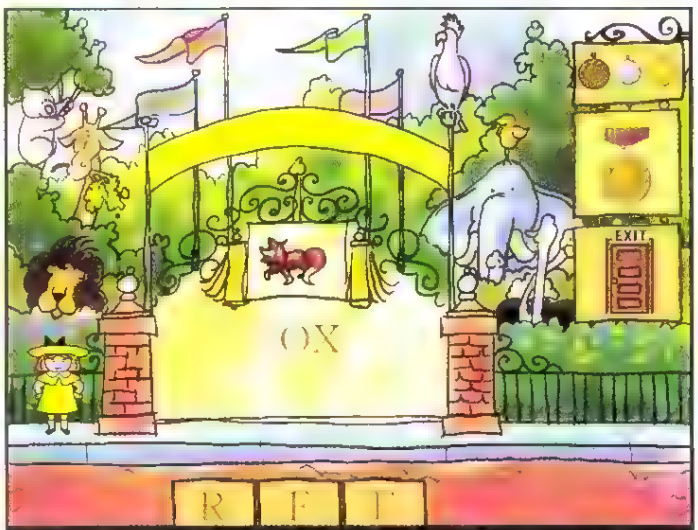
Other trends dotted the digital landscape like exotic flora and mysterious fauna. Most new math programs include puzzle exercises rather than drills. It seems everyone's caught on to the idea that logic, sequencing, and other high-level thinking skills are vital to academic success and ideal lessons to teach on computer. You'll find these exercises in such programs as Disney's new Winnie the Pooh math series for young kids and Davidson's new entries in the Blaster series for Algebra.

A few programs aim to teach social skills, a strange, but — if you think about it — ideal job for the patient, persistent computer. Most of these programs are designed for younger kids, but check out Humongous Entertainment's *Backyard Baseball*, a sports simulation for kids five to ten years old. To prevail in the baseball diamond, kids must learn the idiosyncrasies of the characters, using this knowledge to choose the best players for each game.

And then there's the kudzu of the educational software market. (Someone actually planted kudzu in the South, thinking it would be an attractive, useful plant; now, it's a weed that covers the South like a carpet). Someone actually planted 3D animation in the education market, thinking it would engage kids and compete more vigorously with the entertainment market, now, it's a wart. In most cases, 3D graphics can't compete with the stunning, flat graphics in such programs as Purple Moon's Secret Paths series or Scholastic's upcoming version of the I Spy series for ages five to nine. Watch for DK Multimedia's human body software, though; it uses 3D technology beautifully.

All of these trends wrap around the vita. education market, like the Earth's crust around its core. Now, if only the public would shell out some bucks on the education market's natural beauty instead of squandering their money on the violent games that blast through the convention hall like volcanoes and tornadoes. For now, I've left my E3 wings in Georgia, and I'm land bound again. As I explore the educational software world, I'll pull out this map to orient myself. There's plenty to look at in the next six months. I hope I don't get lost.

PCG



Compare 3D graphics in educational software with this Monet-like scene in Purple Moon's Secret Paths series, and 3D graphics will usually come out the loser.

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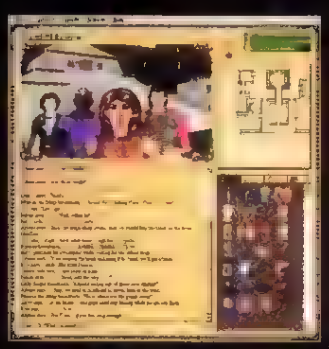

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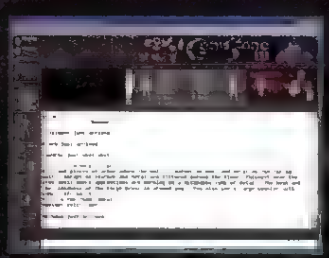

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Net Gaming: The Brave New World

I wrote last month's column before the Electronic Entertainment Expo; now it's time to get caught up on a whole slew of online games unveiled at that monster of a trade show. Most of the games displayed in Atlanta had some kind of multi-player options, but particularly exciting was the amount of online only stuff.

Activision's first online only game, *Netstorm*, is an ambitious and unusual project. The game takes place in the world of Nimbus, which is covered entirely in clouds and has city-states moving about on floating islands, kind of like the cloud island in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

The player commands his cloud island in combat, building a variety of unusual units and buildings based on the three elements of the skies — rain, wind, and thunder. Tapping into this elemental power gives you the energy needed to propel your cloud island into combat; from there, you build up your forces and research new technologies.

The game has a great deal of depth, originality, and sophistication, and the team has also done a particularly good job with the game's lobby as well as keeping permanent stats for players. Hard to explain adequately in brief, it's one that strategy gamers will want to keep an eye on for when it goes into the open beta testing stage.

Sony Interactive has finally settled on a final name for its online tank game, *Tanarus* (it's been called *Battleground* and *Armorgeddon* in the past). The game is a fast-paced combat title, with a mix of console-type action, strategy, and team play. Also noteworthy is the fact that the game is supporting 3D accelerators, starting with the 3Dfx. To check out the beta test, drop by the web site at *www.tanarus.com*.

Meanwhile, VR-1, which has switched entirely over to Internet game design, has six more online games in development beyond *Fighter Ace*. Particularly fresh was *Nomads of Kianth*. Take a desert world like Dune, people it with RPG races like Elves, Dwarves, and the Undead, and put them in really fast, heavily armored Jawa Sand Crawlers, and you have a rough idea of what the game world is all about. Primarily an action game, *Nomads* has these huge Klanthian "battlewagons" roaring across the desert in a combat style that's a mix of *Interstate '76* and World War Two naval combat — these wagons are big and fast, and they take a lot of damage to destroy. It's largely an action game, but roleplaying and strategy elements come into play, too, since you must return to your race's fortified cities in order to trade, rest, and re-equip.

Also noteworthy is *Ultracorps*, a turn-based space conquest game played from entirely within a web browser. A lot like *VGA Planets* or *Stars!*, the key difference in *Ultracorps* is that the game is played on one central server with hundreds or even thousands of players in a single game, rather than the dozen or so in more traditional games. Also, the presentation is slicker and the game runs from within a web browser, making getting into a game very easy. Lots of options encourage players to interact — message boards, headline news, and other forums where players can form alliances or taunt each other. Find out about the *Ultracorps* beta test at *www.vr1.com*.

Interesting, too, is *Crossroads*, also from VR-1. Something of a throwback in this day of 3D polygon engines, the game is at heart a MUD, or multi-user dungeon, the kind of game that pioneered Internet gaming. Text-based, the game takes as its subject conspiracy theory, UFOs, the Men In Black, paranormal phenomena — imagine a multi-player, social game of *The X-Files*. Two worlds exist within the game — the terrestrial world, rife with conspiracies, dark secrets, and innuendo, and a dream world, where you take on entirely different characteristics in a haunted, surrealistic landscape. While a text parser may sound old hat, keep in mind you'll be interacting with other users, and that makes all the difference.

Though I only had time for the typical rushed, trade-show tour of the VR-1 booth during E3, I came away impressed with the originality of the company's lineup. Considering we're going to be stuck on modems for some years yet, it seems that someone has learned from what worked in the semi-commercial past of Internet gaming — that it's not always necessary to transplant 3D graphics and twitch action onto the packet-dropping mess that is the Internet.

Since VR-1 only develops online games — it doesn't publish them — when and where these games will be available (and for how much cash) is something that will have to be hashed out in the boardrooms. VR-1's first net title, *Fighter Ace*, has already been picked up by Microsoft for its Internet Gaming Zone; the others should be picked up somewhere soon.

You may have noticed that I didn't mention the most anticipated Internet game of them all — *Ultima Online*. There's a good reason for that, even though it was the most talked about online game at the show: I'm expecting my beta test CD any day now. So next month, should all go well, I'll be able to tell you about my first ambles through Britannia.

While waiting for the CD, I spent a good deal of time looking at the remarkably thorough and extremely informative *Ultima Online* preview web site at *www.owo.com*, so I already have a good idea what my character's skills will be like. I'm opting for a magic-oriented character with some long-range combat and thieving abilities.

I haven't picked a name yet, although Mike Wolf has already chosen one, cleverly combining two of the Words of Power. Whatever our names, I'm sure that between the two of us, a wide swathe of Britannia will soon be held under our sway. (We expect Todd Vaughn and Dan Bennett's characters will soon be our lackeys as well.) PCG

Internet games made their strongest showing yet at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, and we can't wait to play 'em.

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Scenario B

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New Games and New Times

Isn't it a great time to be a gamer? I mean, let's face it — we've got it all. We've got technology that's breaking barriers of light and sound, with 3D acceleration, high-speed modems, force-feedback peripherals, and the growth of the largest pool of easily accessible game players, the Internet. Plus, we've got a whole gaggle of new roleplaying games (RPGs) poised to flood store shelves with Gaming Goodness, as this month's RPG roundup shows.

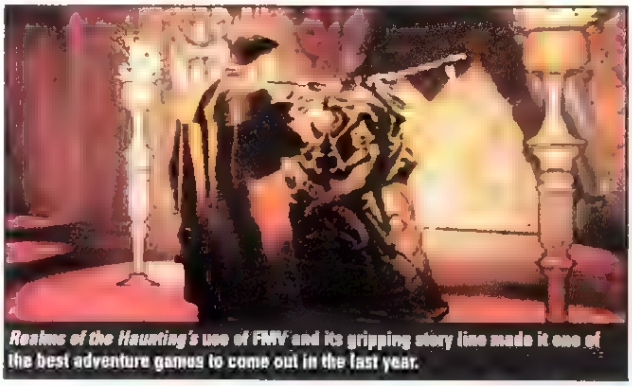
Now all we need are some changes in the graphic adventure market. Excuse me while I step off of the RPG soapbox and onto the adventure podium. As you've probably noticed, there haven't been too many graphic adventures on the market recently. Now, I won't waste time lamenting the seemingly decimated ranks of graphic adventures — lord knows, there's been enough whining coming from those of us in RPG community over the past couple of years, while RPGs took a turn for the worse. Still, I haven't really seen a *great* adventure game since *Realms of the Haunting* several months ago.

First of all, we should all agree on the definition of "adventure game." Just like RPGs, they're hard to define and everyone has his own ideas. But I prefer to think of an adventure game as something that contains lots of story elements, puzzles, inventory and character interaction. You also usually control a specific character or characters that play a significant role in the story. Roleplaying games seem to turn away from the typical adventure when you head into combat, character skill advancement, and more branching story lines.

So what matches those criteria? Well, of course the Sierra adventures land right in the middle, with the Kings Quest, Space Quest, Leisure Suit Larry, and Quest for Glory series. But you also have to factor in, to some extent, puzzle games like *Shivers* and *Zork Nemesis*. For better or worse, those games are being marketed as adventures, and they've come to rule the market in the wake of *Myst*. The last really different adventure would probably have to be *Realms of the Haunting* — you had combat with no skill increases, character interaction, a rather linear story line, and plenty of puzzles and inventory.

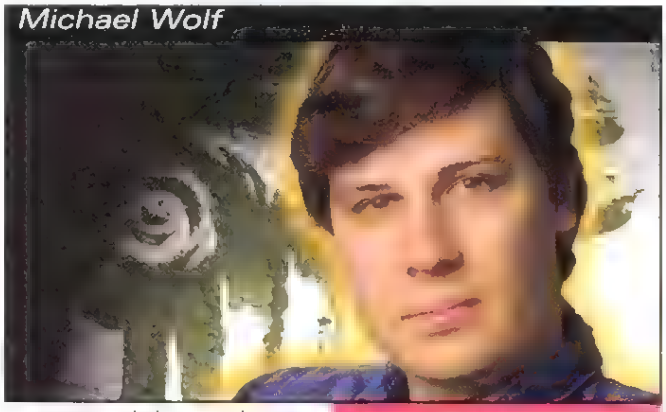
There's certainly nothing wrong with the traditional formula, though. *Beavis and Butt-head in Virtual Stupidity* was fabulous, as were the older games like *Sam and Max Hit the Road*, the Monkey Island series, and of course the two Gabriel Knight games. Although *Myst* has certainly been popular, its followers in the puzzle/adventure market haven't done nearly as well (although I still think *Zork Nemesis* was great).

Changes are coming, however. In a long ago column (September 1996) titled "Adventure's Changing Faces," I went on at length about how the adventure genre has changed since the days of text parser, and I posed the question of where *you* would like it to go. The responses I got were overwhelming, with most readers arguing that the recent emphasis on full-motion video (FMV) and state of the art graphics has sorely affected gameplay and the depth of story lines. The changes on their way, though, aren't a step back to the past of interactivity — they're a step toward the future and a whole new style of adventure game. Take a gander at Sierra's new *Quest for Glory V*, for instance (our Scoop! appeared in the July 1997 issue). No video in this one, instead it has 3D-rendered backgrounds and 3D characters. Rather than fill up tons of space on a CD with lengthy FMV or voice-overs, that space is going toward complex game engines that allow for more interaction with the environment.



Realms of the Haunting's use of FMV and its gripping story line made it one of the best adventure games to come out in the last year.

Michael Wolf



Some new games move away from the old genre in an altogether different fashion. *Black Onyx*, from Blue Planet Software, promises to present a whole new way to adventure, with a kind of "card" system that will make combat as well as the usual adventure elements of talking, traveling, and inventory management a whole new ball game. The combat looks especially promising, with motion captured characters realistically portraying sword swings, dodges, and even limps from injuries. Also, the next King's Quest game from Sierra, *Mask of Eternity*, should stray considerably from the norm that was basically established by the first game in that same series. These two games, as well as a slew of others in development, have combined to put RPG elements into a graphic adventure, something we're sure to see happen more and more.

Just as RPGs are growing, changing, and utilizing new technologies to make games larger, more engrossing, and more *fun*, graphic adventures have started to push the boundaries. Perhaps some time in the future we'll see a merging of the two genres into a single entity. That'll sure make my job easier!

Sure, we know that roleplaying games are [illegible] changes, but what about the ailing adventure category? Isn't it due for a change, too?

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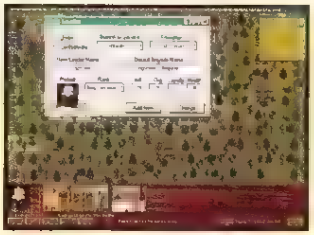

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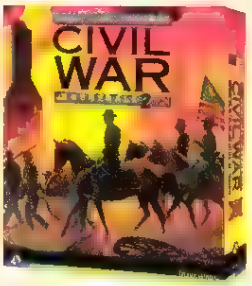

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FROM THE CREATORS OF ROBERT E. LEE: CIVIL WAR GENERAL

TalonSoft Charts a New Course

As anyone who's attended the Electronic Entertainment Expo knows, the three day parade of demos and sales pitches can numb the senses to the point where all the games combine into one big, noisy blur. By the end of Day Two, I was ready to rip the lungs out of the next person who spoke the phrase "real-time strategy game". :). But of course, certain games *do* stand out and stick in your mind like sand burrs long after the demo is finished.

One of the wargames that made a most vivid impression on me was *East Front*, the first of TalonSoft's new Campaign Series. The Stalingrad street-battle I saw evoked memories of Sam Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron*, so faithfully did it seem to capture the merciless intensity of the Russian Front.

I had a nice chat at the TalonSoft booth with Jim Rose, the company's founder, followed by a longer interview with Associate Producer Shawn Franklin about the new directions TalonSoft is taking and what wargamers can expect from this highly respected publisher. Here's a Q and A distillation of those conversations.

PCG: The Battleground Series is now officially terminated. Why?

T/soft: It did what we set out to do — it put us on the map and gave us a solid catalog of games that rated highly both with reviewers and with consumers. But we'd gotten about as much mileage out of the Civil War games as we could, and the series will end with a Napoleonic bang in *Prelude to Waterloo*. If you thought the Borodino game was big, wait 'til you see this one! The main drawback to the series was, ironically, a by-product of one of its great virtues: those exquisite hand-drawn maps. By using them, we made it impossible to include custom scenario editors or really full-blown campaigns.

PCG: Does this mean that the long-promised Arab-Israeli Battleground game has been scrubbed or will it be converted to the new format?

T/soft: It's probably dead. Rather surprisingly, we never got more than a tepid response to that idea. We got *lots* of suggestions from Civil War and Napoleonic buffs, but you'll notice we did not do another 20th Century battle after the Battle of the Bulge game. It's true, as many reviewers pointed out, that the system worked better for 19th Century combat.

PCG: Will gamers who are used to the lush detail of the Battleground maps be disappointed in the look of the new games?

T/soft: Were *you* disappointed with the Stalingrad demo you saw?

PCG: Hell, no! I could tell there was a subtle difference to the overall look, but the level of detail was still incredibly realistic.

T/soft: Okay, then. Just because we're rendering the maps differently doesn't mean any degradation in their quality. The main advantage of our new engine is that it permits you to generate and edit scenarios and to play full, satisfying campaigns. We think that's a good trade off and we're betting our customers will agree.

PCG: I notice that the Campaign series will enlist the talents of some well known wargame designers, guys like Jim Dunnigan, Dana Lombardy and Richard Berg. What degree of input will they have?

T/soft: They'll be contributing scenarios of their own design — whatever battle turns them on, essentially. So each product in the Campaign series will have "designer-label" scenarios included. The idea has a certain cachet to it, we think.

PCG: Following the release of *East Front*, what other Campaign titles are in the pipeline?

East Front will be the first title using TalonSoft's new Campaign Series wargame engine.

T/soft: Well, obviously, *West Front* will be a logical follow up. Beyond that, probably Pacific War, Korean War, and Vietnam games, but the details are still a little murky at this moment because we don't want too much overlap with Norm Koger's *Operational Art of War*, a game which we take special pride in publishing.

PCG: I understand naval war will not be neglected..

T/soft: No, indeed. As a follow up to the successful *Age of Sail*, we'll soon be publishing *Age of Ironclads*, covering naval warfare from the Civil War to the pre-dreadnought era in the late 1800s. This, too, will have an entirely new engine. Instead of eight points of the compass, you can now maneuver through 16. And we're aiming at full 3D graphics. There will be full coverage of the riverine campaigns in the Civil War, the sortie of the *CSS Albemarle*, and a number of obscure, but fascinating, European engagements that were fought in the 1870s and 1880s — battles no one has ever simulated before.

PCG: I understand you're also adding your first non-wargame product..

T/soft: Oh, it'll have plenty of warfare in it, why do you think it's called *Clan Wars*? It's a post-apocalyptic strategy-fest with all the popular features: real time, Internet capable, multi-player, you name it. And the first time we saw it, it knocked our socks off.

PCG: Sounds like a cornucopia of gaming goodness. I can't wait to get my hands on *East Front*, and I hope the new Campaign series does as well, or better, than the Battleground games did.

PCG

As the fabled Battleground Series comes to an end, TalonSoft prepares a major offensive in new directions, and the future looks promising.

King of the Hill

Many moons ago, when the standard PC game port was designed, everyone figured two analog joysticks with two buttons each was more than enough. After all, other home computers only supported one or two joysticks with one button each.

But the founding fathers of the PC didn't take into account how much more complex a PC game could be than the average videogame or Commodore 64 program. And more complex games called for better controllers.

The first signs of this came in the mid-1980s, when Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* let one gamer use all the capabilities of both joysticks simultaneously — you could set up the right-hand joystick as your flight yoke and use the left-hand joystick as a throttle (the up-down axis) and rudder pedals (the left-right axis).

I don't know for sure which company first realized that the four axes and four buttons supported by the PC game port didn't *have* to be in two separate joysticks, but I suspect it was Thrustmaster. To the best of my knowledge, Thrustmaster's Flight Control System was the first joystick to take advantage of this concept, borrowing one axis and both buttons from the second joystick to create one stick with four buttons and a four-way "hat switch." The high-end controller market was born.

And that market has been very good to Thrustmaster. Good enough that they've introduced a whole bunch of new controllers over the years. The Hillsboro, Oregon, company invented new gadgets like rudder pedals; the Weapons Control System (a throttle controller with programmable buttons), and the F-16 FLCS and Throttle Quadrant System, an authentic-looking (and very expensive) programmable stick-and-throttle setup.

Thrustmaster's products weren't perfect. They were costly, and some of them weren't constructed well enough to justify their price tags. Also, programming the WCS or the FLCS was a real chore; it involved writing a complicated text file using specialized commands, like programming in BASIC. But for a while, Thrustmaster was the only game in town.

Today, that's no longer true. The four-button stick with a hat switch isn't even high-end any more, it's basic equipment. And for the past few years, other companies have offered sturdier, more comfortable versions of this baseline stick at a lower price.

Thrustmaster's corner on the market for button-encrusted programmable controllers has eroded, too, with good programmable sticks and/or throttles coming from Suncom, Gravis, Logitech, CH Products, and now Saitek. In most cases, these rival products are cheaper than their Thrustmaster counterparts, and yet they look and feel more expensive. And, perhaps more importantly, all of these newer controllers are much easier to program than Thrustmaster's.

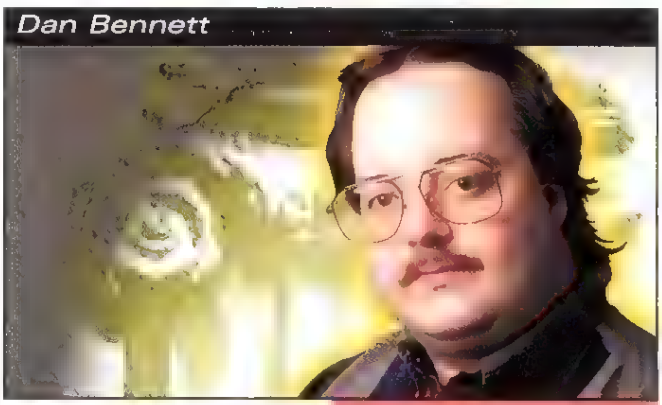
Strangely, the only improvements to Thrustmaster's programming system have come from outside Thrustmaster. Add-on programs like Sim-Tech's *S-Commander* (*www.simtech.co.uk*) and Marlo Casabar's *EZBuild* (E-mail: *EZBuild@aol.com*) give Thrustmaster's text-based programming a friendlier, point-and-click Windows interface, but there's only so much they can do with such an old-fashioned system. Meanwhile, controllers like Saitek's X36 joystick and throttle combo (my current favorites; see this month's Hard Stuff section for a review) make programming multiple buttons, switches, and knobs as easy and transparent as it could be.

For a while, it looked like Thrustmaster was standing still while rival companies made strides in quality, comfort, price, and ease of use. But over the past year or so, they've been making subtle changes to their strategy to keep rivals from eating their lunch in the market they basically created.

The Top Gun joystick has replaced the Flight Control System at the bottom of Thrustmaster's line, putting a lower price on the same basic features. A new programmable throttle shown at the Electronic Entertainment Expo promises to do the same for the WCS. A new version of the Top Gun should be the first flight stick made for PCs that use the Universal Serial Bus (USB), and there's even a digital, programmable gamepad that looks like it could be the most comfortable one yet for the PC.

Most interesting of all, though, is Thrustmaster's Millennium 3D Inceptor, a new joystick modeled on the stick used in NASA's Space Shuttle. It's designed for Windows 95 (and DOS games that can run under Win 95), it's digital, and it has six programmable buttons and a four-way hat switch. It also sports four programmable axes of control: up-down, left-right, a clockwise-counterclockwise twist, and a throttle slider. All of that is packed into a very cool looking stick with a big, stable base. I had the chance to try a prototype of the Inceptor at E3 back in June, and it felt to me like the sturdiest, most comfortable stick Thrustmaster has produced so far. Not only that, but it looks like it's going to be a lot easier to calibrate and program than the traditional Thrustmaster fare. Very promising.

So Thrustmaster's no longer the only game in town, and probably never will be again. But the company got where it is today by being the first to spot a need in PC gaming and coming up with products to fill that need — and it looks like some of that vision is finding its way back into the picture. That's good news for gamers in general — and sim fans in particular. PCG



In the face of growing competition, Thrustmaster has had to make some interesting changes to stay strong in the high-end controller market.

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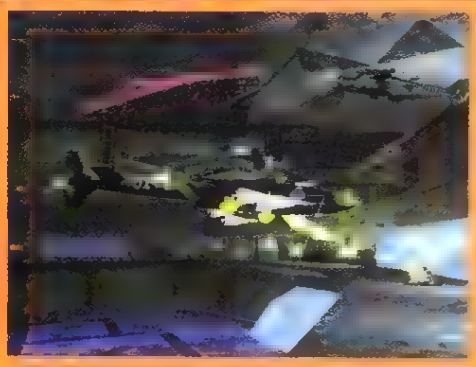

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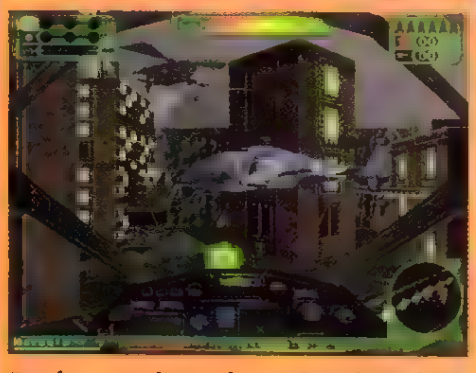

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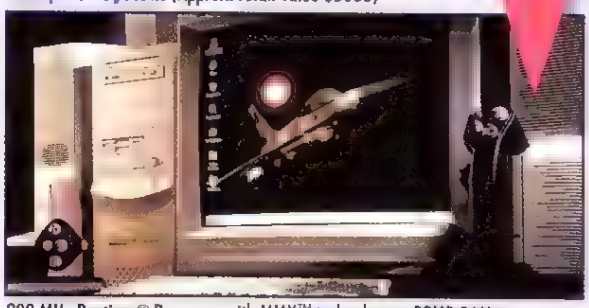

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WARLORDS 3' A medieval fantasy setting forms the backdrop for a struggle among barbarian hordes. Random map generation makes every battle a fresh new conflict. Multiple terrains, animated graphics and over 80 types of heroes, creatures and warriors.
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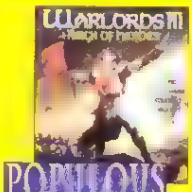

'POPULOUS THE THIRD COMING' Large strategies can be planned and enacted from fully playable global view. Various terrain varieties(mountains, oceans, acres, etc.) present different challenges on your warriors as you lead them into battle.
Electronic Arts (Strategy)
Release Date: NOW PC CD $46

'PANZER GENERAL II' contains enhanced multimedia footage and scenario briefings. Also all new campaigns play some from the Allied side. New interactive terrain reflects battle damage. Multiplayer support.
SSI(War)
Release Date: NOW PC CD $42

FALLOUT' Set in the aftermath of a world-wide nuclear war. It is your challenge to survive as a person who has grown up in a secluded underground survival vault. Circumstances force you outside to a strange world 80 years after the end of modern civilization. A world of mutants, radiation, gangs and violence.
Interplay (Roleplaying)
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CIVIL WAR GENERALS' The Battle of the Blue and Grey is bigger, better and bolder. Multiple campaigns covering battles from both the Eastern and Western Theaters are included in this sequel to the highly acclaimed Robert E. Lee Civil War General. Internet and LAN Support.
Sierra (War)
Release Date: NOW PC CD $48

'STAR WARS' This roleplaying game plunges you into the breakneck thrills and pulse-pounding excitement of the greatest space fantasy of all time! Face overwhelming odds and impossible challenges. May the force be with you.
West End Games (Pen/Paper Roleplaying)
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'AXIS & ALLIES Decide the fate of a nation and the destiny of the world. The Balkans have fallen. Pearl Harbor has been attacked. Wake Island is in Japanese hands and Rommel has the British on the run!
Milton Bradley (Board Game)
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WAR WIND II HUMAN ONSLAUGHT' A greater variety of vehicular mechanized and assault units with special abilities, 4 campaign options, 46 scenarios. Multiple leaders with varying strengths add to strategic challenge. Multiplayer network support.
Mindscape (Strategy)
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Wizards of the Coast (Card game)
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'LANDS OF LORE II' You are Luther, cursed son of the Sorceress of Darkness, exploring treacherous lands in search of ancient magic, a super power that will release you from your inheritance!
Virgin (Roleplaying)
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WAR INC.' In the 21st Century, private security forces have evolved into powerful armies under corporate control. Take command of your own corporation and its armies, assume control of R&D, production and strategic and tactical combat.
Interactive Magic (War)
Release Date: NOW PC CD $46

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STRATEGY CENTRAL

SOLUTIONS • TECHNIQUES • QUICK TIPS

There's so much good stuff in Strategy Central this month, we don't even know where to start. Okay, take a deep breath, here we go. We've got hints and tips for: *688[I] Hunter/Killer, Ecstatica II, X-COM: Apocalypse, iF-22, The Last Express, Capitalism Plus, Interstate '76*, and more! Whew, you better start reading right now!

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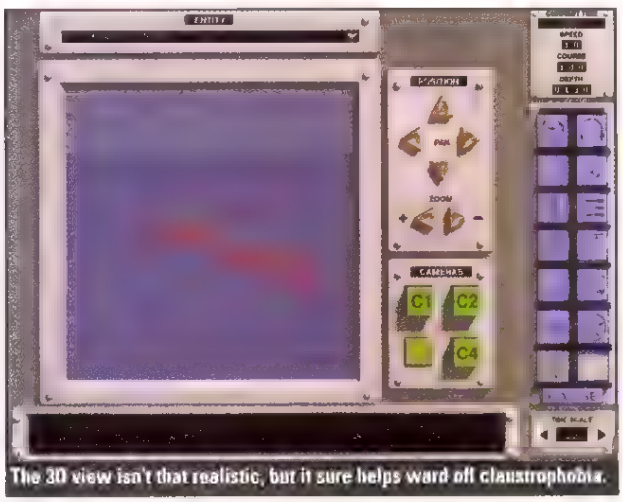
688[I] Hunter/Killer, Part 1

Jane's latest combat simulation is a taut recreation of modern-day undersea combat. The level of realism is staggering and takes some getting used to, but our expert tips should make your life as a nuclear sub captain that much easier.

Modern submarine warfare is a game of "cat and mouse" characterized by hours of boredom mixed with moments of sheer terror. The lightning speed and lethality of naval weaponry today ensures that most engagements, once initiated, will begin and end in minutes, if not seconds. *688[I] Hunter/Killer* recreates this fast-paced excitement. It's exactly the type of realistic military simulation we've come to expect from Janes Combat Simulations. It's also darn hard, which is why we're presenting these tips designed to make sure you're the cat, and not the mouse.



The 3D view isn't that realistic, but it sure helps ward off claustrophobia.

The Importance of Being First

Naval vessels have been likened to "eggshells armed with sledgehammers," meaning that their punch far exceeds their ability to absorb damage. A single hit from one of your weapons is enough to sink or cripple an enemy vessel. Unfortunately, enemy vessels carry the same weapons as you, so don't think you're going to spend time trading blows with the opposition. If you can be seen, you can be hit... and if you get hit, you are usually destroyed.

The key to winning a naval battle, therefore, lies in being able to get in the first shot. This isn't just idle speculation. Getting in the first shot is a recognized and fundamental precept of modern naval warfare. A vessel that knows it's under attack will take appropriate countermeasures. No attacking vessel wants to give its target a chance to defend itself, much less shoot back. Ideally, enemy ships and submarines should be destroyed before they are even aware they are in danger.

Getting in the first shot should be a piece of cake for a submarine skipper, but it still requires steady seamanship and a keen appreciation for electronic wizardry. Mainly, it will depend upon your ability to maneuver effectively and quietly. I stress the word *quietly*... more on that in a moment.

Modern naval weapons have extremely long ranges. This lets naval vessels exert influence over a lot of ocean. That's the good part. The bad part is that this represents a lot of room for potential threats to hide in. Every square mile of water can conceal an enemy sub, so before you go charging after the first thing to appear, take a good look around. There are almost always additional enemy vessels lurking in the depths.

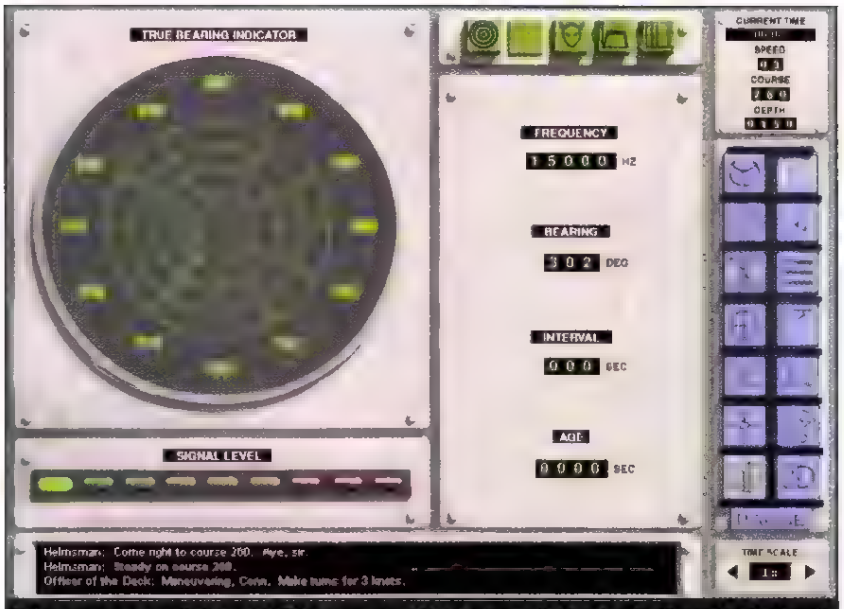
The sooner you begin making contacts, the sooner you can begin the process of identifying them. This is an extremely important process. Before you identify a contact, it's only prudent to treat it as an enemy. The game designers, however, have cleverly included biological as well as friendly objects in most scenarios. Think how foolish you are going to feel launching a torpedo at a whale, or even worse, a friendly ship. By the same token, mistaking an Akula for a pleasure boat can ruin your day out.

Quick Tips on Being First

- Your initial attack must be decisive. Don't give the target a chance to defend itself and never give it an opportunity to fire back.
- Be vigilant. Early detection and target classification lets you control the events.
- Choose the proper weapon for the job. Balance the need to strike first with the need for accuracy and the need for stealth.

Developing Situational Awareness

Intelligence reports you receive before leaving port are valuable, but they are sometimes dated and never 100 percent accurate. You're advised, therefore, to stop and take a good look around before proceeding. Just knowing what you're up against will give you an edge. In game terms, this means quickly locating and identifying objects you encounter so that you know where your friends are as well as your enemies.



Active sonars are easily detected. This enemy vessel has just revealed itself and will soon be destroyed.

As a general rule, you will spend most of a patrol just listening to the water. Each object you discover builds on your level of situational awareness. It's important to gather this information early on because once you begin moving your chances of detecting new objects decreases. Your chances of being detected, on the other hand, rise dramatically. The trick is to make your grasp of the situation as good as it possibly can be before you are forced to act.

The fact is that the more you are aware of things going on around you, the less likely it is that you'll be taken by surprise. Building situational awareness takes time. The 688[I] has a distinct sensory advantage over other vessels. But no matter how good your listening devices are, you won't detect everything at the same time. Contacts will come and contacts will go.

Enemy vessels on the move are easily spotted. It's the ones lying in wait that will give you the most trouble. Keep in mind that chasing after some noisy surface contact might just be leading you into an ambush. When searching an area, do a thorough job. There's always a possibility that some enemy sub may be maneuvering to get in your baffles.

Quick Tips on Situational Awareness

- Spend most of your time listening. Only move when necessary.
- Identifying contacts is important. Know the location of friends as well as enemies.
- Building situational awareness takes time. Use the accelerated time feature to make it go by quicker, but above all... be patient.
- Be alert for ambushes. Don't assume you've detected all the enemy vessels in a scenario. Always consider the presence of additional enemy vessels.

Sonar Detection

Your 688[I] has three primary sonar arrays: spherical, hull, and towed. Of the three, the towed array is the most effective. It is 20 percent more sensitive than the other sonar arrays and can, on average, detect objects as far away as 18 nautical miles. Because it is towed, however, its detection zone extends from the rear of the ship in a 240 degree arc. This isn't helpful if you are trying to see what's ahead. To get the most from this sensor, simply change course so that the sensor arc sweeps the area you wish to cover.

The forward looking sensor is called the spherical array. This array is a huge dome-shaped sensor that covers a 300 degree arc extending from the bow of the sub. On average, it is effective out to a range of seven nautical miles. It is less sensitive than the towed array, but it has both a "passive" mode and an "active" mode.

The third, and last, sensor is the hull array. It operates in narrowband frequencies and covers an area that extends 120 degrees centered abeam. This sensor is primarily used to identify targets that are detected by one of the other arrays.

Sonar detection is based on a number of interrelated factors. First, each vessel is rated (from [1] to [3]) according to the amount of noise it makes. A rating of [1] indicates a quiet vessel while a rating of [3] represents a loud vessel. (The 688[I], for example, is very quiet and has been assigned a [1] rating.) This baseline rating is modified by the vessel's speed at any given point in time. Distance and sea state are also factored in. Obviously, as distance increases and the seas become rougher, detection is less likely.

The most significant part of the detection equation is the vessel doing the detecting. Its detection ability is a function of its speed and the specific type of sensor it is using. Speed is an important consideration since a sensor must overcome the noise being generated by the vessel. In other words, a fast-moving vessel may create so much noise that it drowns out its own sensors.

To get a more accurate fix on a contact, multiple arrays should be brought to bear. Change course to unmask your towed array and allow it to assist your bow sonar in developing contacts (and vice versa). Making large course changes also helps your TMA (target motion analysis) by letting your sensors track a contact from different angles. This makes it easier for you to ascertain a contact's range, course, bearing, and speed.

Not only are course changes recommended, but changes in depth are often necessary also. Take note in scenarios where a thermal layer exists. The detection range of your sensors is halved when crossing the layer. When trying to avoid detection, place your submarine on the opposite side of the layer, away from your enemy. If you are trying to make contact, stay on the same side of the layer.

The Broadband waterfall display is your most useful tool for locating other vessels — enemy or friendly.

Your spherical array has an "active" mode in addition to its "passive" listening mode. When operating in "active" mode your sonar sends a pulse of energy (a "ping") through the water. This pulse detects objects in the water much like radar detects objects in the air. It is much more accurate than "passive" sonar, but there's a price to be paid for this accuracy. "Active" sonar lets the enemy know exactly where you are. For this reason, think twice before using it.

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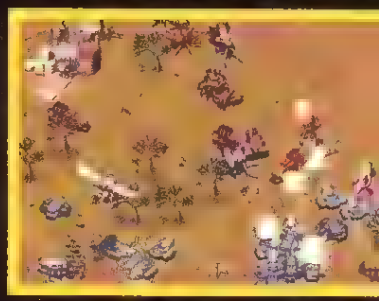

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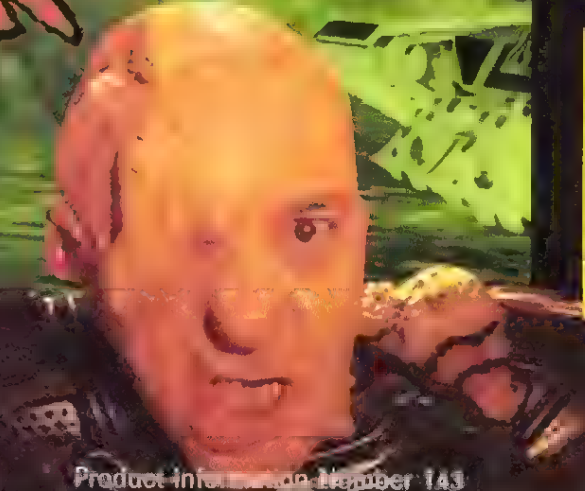

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Quick Tips on Using Sonar:

- The towed array is your most sensitive piece of detection equipment
- Change course frequently to give your sonar arrays a better TMA fix
- Pay close attention to your position in relation to the thermal layer.
- Use "passive" means of detection unless faced with an emergency.
- "Active" sonar alerts the enemy and makes it easy for them to detect you

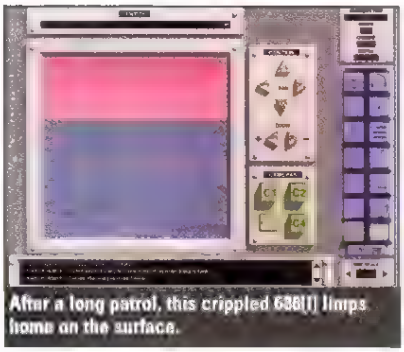
Radar and ESM Detection

Although the vast majority of contacts will be made via sonar, there will be times when using radar will be preferable. These instances will be few and far between however, since radar sends out waves of detectable energy. Keep in mind that the enemy is very likely to get a fix on your position if you begin using radar. Just like "active" sonar, using your radar lights you up like a pinball machine. Limit the use of radar to situations in which you've already been discovered by the enemy.

To use radar, your submarine must be no deeper than 60 feet. You must also traveling at less than four knots or risk damaging the radar mast. Radar is effective in detecting surface and air targets at long distances. Don't attempt to use it for sub-surface surveillance; it won't work. Unfortunately, radar can only give you a contact's range and bearing. To identify a contact, you must either use sonar or raise your ESM mast.

Raising the ESM (Electronic Support Measures) mast lets you instantly determine the bearing and identity of surface contacts. Used in conjunction with radar, ESM provides with all the data you'll need to launch an attack. In fact, there's no reason why you should ever use radar without using ESM also, at least from a detection standpoint. As soon as you get the targeting information you need, lower all the masts. The radar and ESM masts are very visible while in operation.

The online information section contains a wealth of data and photographs direct from the Jane's archives.


After a long patrol, this crippled 688(I) limps home on the surface.

Quick Tips on Using Radar/ ESM:

- Radar and ESM sensors are only good against surface and air targets.
- You must be less than 60 feet deep and traveling less than four knots to use Radar/ ESM.
- When using radar, use ESM also. The two sensors working together will give you a complete picture of a contact
- Limit the time you spend with your masts above the surface of the water You are easily detected when your radar is in operation.

Keeping A Low Profile

Finding the enemy is undoubtedly an important part of the game, but your number one concern should always be keeping the enemy from finding you. To be an effective hunter/killer you must maintain a low profile. After all, your best weapon is stealth. Lose the element of surprise and you will find yourself going from hunter to hunted in very short order. Here are some helpful hints on avoiding detection.

You are most vulnerable to detection while in transit, so keep your movements limited to short hops. Once you've determined what the enemy is doing, position yourself so that the enemy must come toward you and not vice versa. Get to where you are going, than just drift. A 688(I) moving at less than five knots is virtually undetectable. Moving at greater than five knots, though, creates detectable levels of noise. The faster you go, the noisier you become. The noise continues to increase until ultimately you begin to cavitate.

Cavitation is a phenomenon that occurs when a submarine tries to move too fast through the water. This condition creates a tremendous amount of noise and is easily detected. Essentially, the deeper you go, the faster you can travel without cavitating. Check the cavitation graph before each mission This graph will give you a readout of your safe operating speeds at every depth. If you forget and allow your boat to cavitate, a junior officer will remind you. By this time, however, it's usually too late.

Be aware that the act of launching weapons is also very noisy. Consider this when you are flooding your torpedo tubes and opening your outer doors. Make sure you are ready to shoot before you initiate the launch procedure. Never prematurely announce your presence by readying a weapon too soon. Enemy vessels will hear your preparations and take evasive maneuvers.

The thermal layer plays a major role in submarine tactics. It effectively divides the battlefield into two parts. (The area above the thermal layer is known as the surface duct.) Detection attempts made through the layer cut the range of the sensor in half. In practical terms, a submarine wishing to hide from a surface ship should dip below the thermal layer. A submarine searching for surface ships should travel above the layer. Always keep the position of the thermal layer in relation to your submarine in the back of your mind.

Modern submarines hardly ever travel on the surface. By traveling on the surface, you throw away any pretense of stealth. Except for operating radar, ESM, or receiving radio traffic, there's just no real need to do so. In fact, consider staying away from the surface altogether. At shallow depths, you run an elevated risk of detection and because of cavitation, your speed will be limited also.

The best defense against detection is keeping your distance from enemy vessels. While this would be easy to accomplish given the massive expanse of ocean you work in, your mission is to close with and destroy the enemy. As long as you remain hidden, you can always keep your distance by repositioning your boat. Once you are detected, however, enemy vessels, surface ships in particular, will maneuver in for the kill.

Several missions require you to sink a particular sub or surface ship. Count on these vessels being well guarded. Surface groups usually contain numerous escort vessels whose job it is to keep you away from the larger ships. As a tactical matter, you are advised to maneuver so that you stay at least 15,000 yards away. Move slowly around the flanks until you clear the forward arc of their sensors.

Quick Tips on Avoiding Detection:

- Always travel at the speed necessary for the task at hand. The slower the better. Avoid "cavitation" at all costs.
- Keep internal noise to a minimum.
- Pay close attention to your position in relation to the thermal layer.
- Stay away from the surface. Generally speaking, the deeper you go, the safer you are.
- Detection is a function of distance. Maintain adequate separation from escort vessels.

Maneuvering Tactics and Techniques

Once detection and identification of contacts has been accomplished, the hunt is over. The killing may now begin. Maneuver tactics fall primarily into two categories -- approach maneuvering and defensive countermeasures. Proper approach maneuvering is necessary to close with and destroy an enemy while minimizing the chances of detection. Defensive countermeasures are simply things you are going to do in case your approach maneuvers go awry.

As a hunter, you are expected to roam an assigned area. Often this area will be considerably large. To adequately cover large areas, you'll find yourself having to spend a great deal of time moving from point A to point B before arriving "on station." Unfortunately, your sensory apparatus is less effective while you are in transit.

The solution to this problem is a tactic known as "dash and drift." Basically, "dash and drift" involves moving at a high rate of speed for a short period of time, then slowing down to listen for a while.

For example, rather than moving along at a steady 12 knots, a submarine using "dash and drift" tactics might increase its speed to 15 or 20 knots. After a few minutes, it would slow to five knots or less. While the submarine creeps along (moving just fast enough to maintain positive steerage), its sonar monitors the neighborhood. Once the captain is satisfied that the coast is clear, the sub resumes its dash speed. This "dash and drift" sequence is repeated as many times as are necessary for the sub to get to where it's going.

Again, it is best that you determine the general direction the enemy is traveling then move to intersect this course. You will be most successful when you are able to lie in wait for the enemy to come to you. Never put yourself in the position of having to chase a contact. You'll find yourself playing catch-up and traveling at speeds which increase your risk of detection.

Not every attack will go the way you want it to go. There will be occasions when instead of maneuvering in for the kill, you are surprised and put on the defensive. The first thing you should do is recognize this fact and halt your attack. More skippers get killed trying to press home a failed approach than for any other reason.

Usually your first indication of trouble will be when the sonar operator calls out, "Torpedo in the water." If this happens, immediately drop what you're doing. Time is critical when you are dealing with an incoming torpedo. Make note of its bearing and change your course so that the torpedo is placed in a rear quarter. Increase to flank speed and change your depth, crossing the thermal layer if possible.

Your primary concern at this point is getting outside the search parameters of the torpedo before it begins homing in. Drop decoys each time you change direction or depth. If the torpedo can be lured away from you even for a moment, your chances of evasion are greatly increased. Get the torpedo pointed away from you, then go to flank speed and disappear

The Port of Call screen lets you arm and repair the boat at the start of each mission.

Quick Combat Tips:

- Use "dash and drift" movement to cover large areas
- Make like a "hole in the water." Wait for the enemy to come to you.
- If discovered, break off your attack. Disappear and start over. Never press a failed approach.
- Remember to use the thermal layer as a means of breaking contact
- Keep incoming torpedoes at your 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock position. Never let a torpedo take up a tail-chase aspect. They are faster and will run right up your back.

Weapon Selection

Your selection of weapons will dictate the tactics and the tempo of an impending engagement. The 688(I) carries three main weapons: the Mark 48 ADCAP (Advanced Capability) torpedo, the Harpoon anti-ship missile, and the Tomahawk land attack missile (TLAM). All of these weapons (as well as those carried by the enemy) have extremely long ranges.

Say you are hunting down the Kuznetsov in the *Against All Odds* scenario. Using your ESM antenna, you discover that its battlegroup lies between 40 and 60 nautical miles west of your position. Pop quiz, hotshot. Knowing the importance of striking first and realizing that you may not get a second chance to attack, what do you do?

You can immediately launch Harpoon missiles or you can wait and launch torpedoes. Harpoons have the range and the speed necessary to ensure you'll get in the first shot but you'll be firing them into a general location and not at a specific target. They run the risk of failing to acquire a target to say nothing of the possibility that they might get shot down.

There are good and bad points to using torpedoes also. Torpedoes are far more accurate but to use them you must get considerably closer (15-20nm). Can you transit the area quietly enough so that you arrive at this range and still get in the first shot? It's an awfully big gamble, Skipper.

Remember, the torpedo is still going to take a while to get to the target even after you launch it. For this reason, it's advisable to launch a torpedo in "passive" mode and guide it to the general vicinity of a target. In "passive" mode, a torpedo is less detectable. It can get quite close to an enemy vessel without alerting it. When the enemy finally does realize it's under attack, it's too late. A torpedo can usually close the remaining distance before the target can dodge it.

The Ship Control screen lets you manage the battle from a centralized location.

Quick Tips on Weapon Selection:

- Balance the need for stealth with the need for speed. Select your weapons accordingly.
- Once launched, Harpoons may no longer be controlled. Setting the missile homing seeker to perform a narrow search limits the risk of hitting the wrong target.
- Torpedoes are wire-guided and may be re-directed after launch if necessary.
- "Active" torpedoes are more accurate than "passive" torpedoes but they are more easily detected.

Now that we've established some general operating procedures, we can look at some specific missions and tasks you'll need to perform. Check back next month for Part II of our strategy in which we will dissect each of *688(I) Hunter/Killer's* single and campaign missions.

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Ecstatica II, Part 1

Here's the first half of our complete solution!

Yep, that's right, this is an exhaustive, complete solution to Psygnosis' *Ecstatica II*, one of the most difficult and time-consuming games to cross the Strategy Central desk in quite some time. We know that you'll find this useful, so be sure to tune in next month for even more great tips!

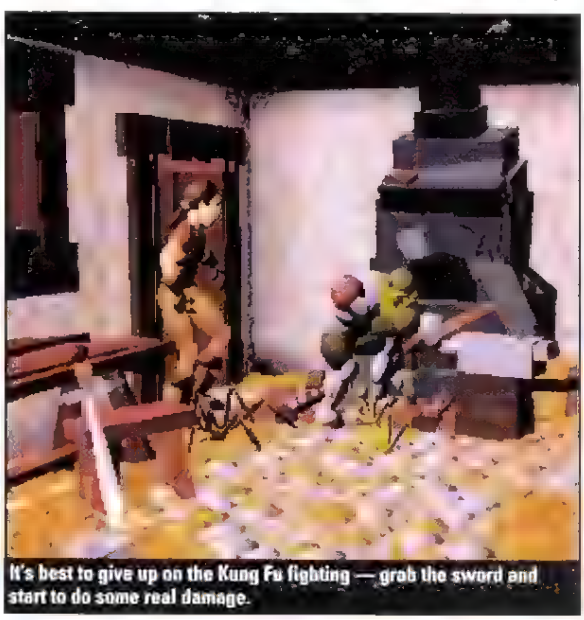
The Guard Tower on your right should be your first stop. Grab a sword and start slashing.

Ecstatica II is a massive — and difficult — combat-oriented game. The first order of business should be getting yourself a sword as soon as possible. From the stocks, you can find a weapon by heading right towards the courtyard. Punch down the second door to your right, which will lead to the Blacksmith's stable. Dash past the beefy stone goblin, take the sword, and start hacking and slashing any pursuing enemies. Exit the stable, and proceed across the courtyard to the large tower with a small door at its base. Knock it open with your sword, and walk through into the first floor of the guard tower.

Drink the yellow flasks scattered about, but leave the red ones — they'll poison you. Head up the staircase, making sure to avoid the poison gas streams spurting out of the wall. On the second floor, bust open the chest on the far right of the room and take the magic rod. Proceed to the third floor, and grab the golden chalice and the coins on the floor. Keep moving up. On the fourth floor, don't try to get the treasures yet, but head up the staircase in the middle of the room to reach the tower

Exercise extreme caution in this room, since the statue holding the key is tripwired. Approach the statue from the right, and kick the key out of its mouth. Once the spear discharges, grab the key, and go through the locked door

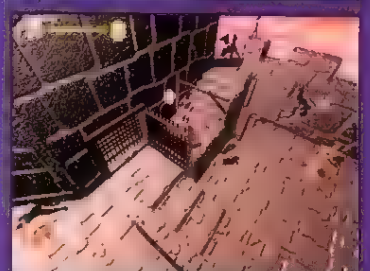
You've made it to the guard tower If you head up the stone staircase, you can find a room which contains a life potion. Walk around the balcony until you find stairs leading upwards. Follow this pathway until the metal gate slams shut behind you. Walk past the tower guarded by the two stone gargoyles, and kill the ball-tossing stone critters who may cross your path. Hang a left down the staircase, and grab the floating armor. Turn around and kill the gargoyle who will attack you from behind. The gargoyles back at the tower won't give you any trouble, so just walk past them and let your magical armor do its work



It's best to give up on the Kung Fu fighting — grab the sword and start to do some real damage.

NECESSARY PROTECTION

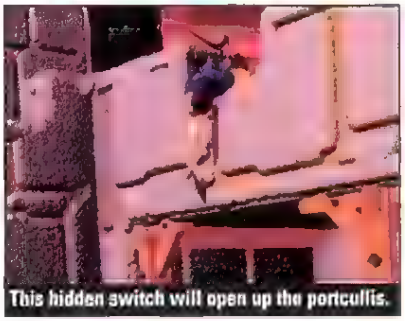
These menacing gargoyles will fry you if you cross their path...



... but if you manage to snag this floating armor, you won't encounter any resistance from 'em.

Proceed carefully up the staircase The second door on the way up isn't locked, so break it open, kill the monster inside, and grab that key. Head back down and unlock the cell door Talk to the priestess inside. After you listen to her clues, keep trudging up that spiral staircase until you hit the top, where you'll find a magic rod. Grab it. Head back down

Once you've reached the ground, the gate at the base of the tower will open. Kill the tiny critter inside the cage and take the diamond. Hit both switches at the base of the stairs Go back to where the floating armor was, and you'll discover that the gate that blocked your progress has opened. Move down into the sub-courtyard, and hit the switch concealed underneath the balcony from whence you came. Go through the newly opened gate, and take the staff located past the


This hidden switch will open up the portcullis.

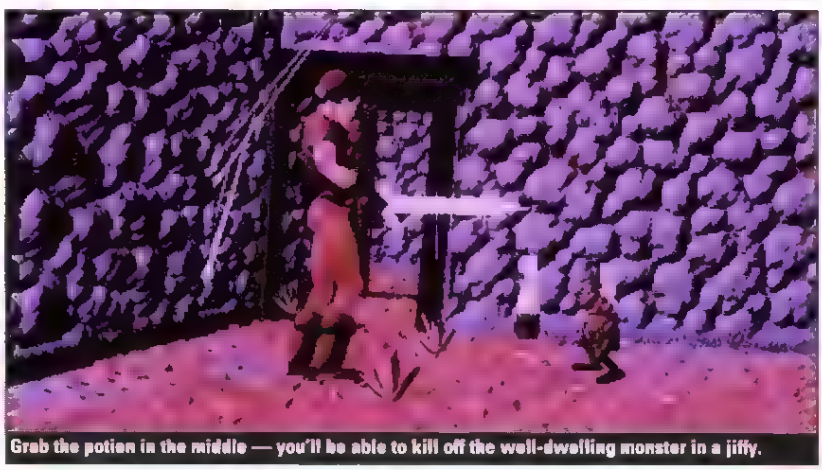
After you've killed the shadowy chap through the arch on the left, consult this crystal ball for advice.

rows of bombs. This will allow you to briefly fire projectile attacks

Exit the tower, and go to your right into the attic. Hit the blue switch, then locate and activate the blue lever A gate will be raised. Go through, whack open the chest, and get the blue key. Use the blue key to open the door with the blue lock. Once inside, hit the green head. Go back to the lever room and flip the green lever. This opens a gate to another room that contains a chest with a purple key. Once you acquire the purple key, unlock the door with the purple lock. Hit the red head inside, then return to the lever room, and hit the red lever. Go back through the blue door and hit the golden head. A nearby gate will open, so feel free to go and load up on treasure, along with a new sword. Finally, whack the nearby head, and leave the attic the way you came in.

A nearby shed on the balcony will open up when approached, so head on in. Hit the statue inside, and head back across the balcony. Stand on the flashing platform, and you'll be teleported back to the tavern. Exit to the courtyard

Remember those big double doors in the courtyard? It's time to pay them a visit again. This time, you should be able to knock them open. Once inside, dispatch all the bad guys. Once you've killed the Shadow Siblings that lurk on the stairs, you'll get the first part of the Elder Sign. Head upstairs and find the throne room. Kill the Shadow Sibling. Exit the throne room, and you'll see a glowing crystal ball. Listen to what the Enchantress has to say and then go ahead and exit to the courtyard.


Grab the potion in the middle — you'll be able to kill off the well-dwelling monster in a jiffy.

Your next destination is the stable that is attached to the castle. In one of the back rooms, there's a ladder leading down to the wine cellar. Once downstairs, hit the statue and head through the door. Hang a right, and go down the stairs into the wine cellar. The monsters down here are just like the one guarding the well in the courtyard — they can't be killed Find the monster that drinks from a purple flask and falls asleep. Snitch the purple flask from him, and return to the courtyard. Walk up to the well monster, who will drink the potion and evaporate. Enter the well. Avoid the red door for now, and go down the stairs into the basement. Kill the approaching skeleton guard, and hit all three levers from left to right

Walk outside to the courtyard, and walk up the stairway beside the hay-ceilinged stable. Hit the golden switch, walk through the door it opens, and break open the chest. Take the boots, exit the room, and sprint across the courtyard to the archway blocked off by slime. Walk through the slime, and hit the black switch located inside. This opens the portcullis in the courtyard. Go through the newly opened portcullis, hit the lever inside, and the drawbridge will finally open.

You may be out of the castle, but you're not out of the woods yet. Go back to the blacksmith's shop. Using the

ATTIC SECRETS

You'll exercise some "leverage" in the attic.

Once you've completed the cumbersome attic puzzle, the door to this shed will be unlocked.

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stairway adjacent to the shop, climb to the roof. Hop in the chimney, teleport to the new location, and go through the open doorway. The stairs going up will lead to the king's tomb, while the stairs leading down go to the catacombs. Head down into the catacombs, do some exploring, and collect two glowing skulls. After collecting each one, return to the King's Tomb and place the skull on the empty wooden stands. The final skull lies on the other side of a watery cave. To cross the small lake, take a leap of faith and step on to the glowing bubbles, which will hold you up. You'll find the final skull through the next door.

Once you've placed all three skulls, the wooden door will open. In the King's Throne Room, get the red amulet, and the *small* cross. Go back down the stairs to where you teleported in, and open the door with the red gem on it. Climb back up to the courtyard and make a bee-line for the exit. Once you've crossed the drawbridge, head to the left of the screen, and climb the staircase, which leads to the graveyard Use the small cross to open the cemetery gates, and hang a right into the chape.. Take the silver sword. Cross the graveyard to the tomb. Enter the tomb, and go forward, right, forward, forward, and up. Retrieve the armor (this will keep you from getting killed by the plants in the wilderness). Go back to the chapel, and trigger the unlit candle to open the staircase going down. Go down the staircase, and then climb the ladder. Once topside, listen to the crystal ball

There's more to this chimney than meets the eye. Go ahead and hop on in once the flame has been extinguished.

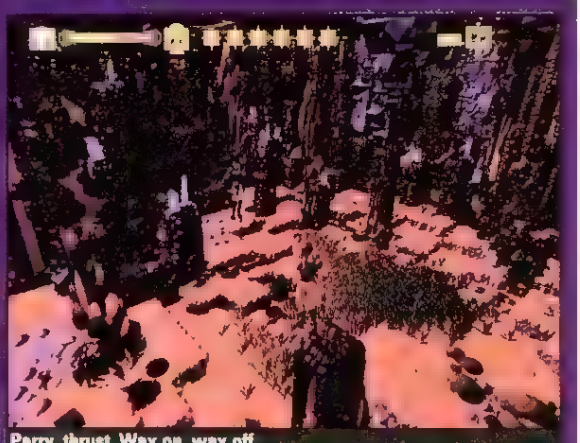
Woohoo! Another piece of the Elder Sign. Grab that puppy and be on your way.

Right off the bat, you'll discover a plant guarding one of the pieces of the Elder Sign. Kill that sucker and take the piece. Keep exploring, and you'll find a clearing. Be careful, as you step on the grass, you'll be attacked by warrior Amazons. Once you've defeated them all, go into the cave, and defeat the sorceress. One of the adjoining caves contains a teleporter; don't go in here yet. Return to the clearing, and kill the plant guarding the piece of the Elder Sign

At this point, you should be about halfway through the game. Take a break, and we'll pick up next month!

BUSTIN' A MOVE

Though the combat system may appear frustrating at first (especially with those pesky enemies that leave little room open for your own attacks), *Ecstatica II* allows you to link up moves to create destructive combos. The most effective move combination is a slash followed by a thrust, by holding down Control and pressing left, then up.



Parry, thrust. Wax on, wax off.

Throughout the game, you'll encounter a variety of weapons. Magical staffs have much longer range, but may not do as much damage as a regular sword. Once you've progressed to the point where you can open the blue doors, head to the top level of the guard tower, and you'll be able to crack open a treasure trove that includes a massively powerful golden sword.

Every now and then, a killed creature will release a scroll that allows you to fire a projectile attack. Pick these up and save 'em for the big bosses.

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X-COM: Apocalypse, Part 1

What's Earth to do when aliens start invading? Why, turn to X-COM, of course. But can you command Earth's best, last, and only line of defense against alien attack? With these helpful hints, no problem!

Aliens have been spotted in the Senate. UFOs are attacking the Astrodome. Your sister has been brainsucked. Who you gonna call? X-COM, of course. Creatures are popping up everywhere, infiltrating powerful corporations and terrifying the good citizens of Mega-Primus.

To save what's left of our civilization, you'll have to master two very different — and difficult — segments of the game. In the city, you're the commander of elite squads charged with responding quickly to sightings of hostile aliens - kind of a futuristic SWAT team. Back in the office, you're faced with recruitment, management, weapons procurement and civil air defense. This aspect of the game isn't as thrilling as urban combat, but it's every bit as important.

This month, we'll tackle the tactical side of X-COM, showing you how to fight effectively, eliminate alien threats quickly — and keep your agents alive. Next time, we'll take a look at managing your squads, researching alien life forms and technology, and maintaining an airborne defense of the city.

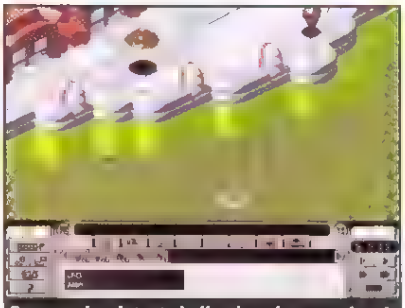
PART 1: TACTICAL COMBAT

FIRST STEPS

Before you dash off to fry some aliens with your laser rifle, you should take care of a few mundane issues back at the office when you start a new campaign. First, get to know your recruits. We like to rename our agents, using the names of colleagues, friends, rock stars — whatever. This makes it much easier to keep track of your squad members and their different abilities. It also makes the consequences of your combat decisions more meaningful, especially when you hear a scream and learn that "Dan Bennett has been brainsucked."

Your new recruits are already equipped with armor and weapons, but don't send them into the field without making sure they're carrying the weapons you want. You'll usually have a couple of agents armed with stun grapples. That's okay when you're able to capture live specimens, but you can't do that until you've built a biotech module. For now, swap out the stun grapples for laser rifles or machine guns.

Base operations take precedent over alien hunting if you hope to get your squad into shape during the initial stages of the game.



Once you've detected alien invaders, send multiple interceptors to prevent incurring damage to your units.

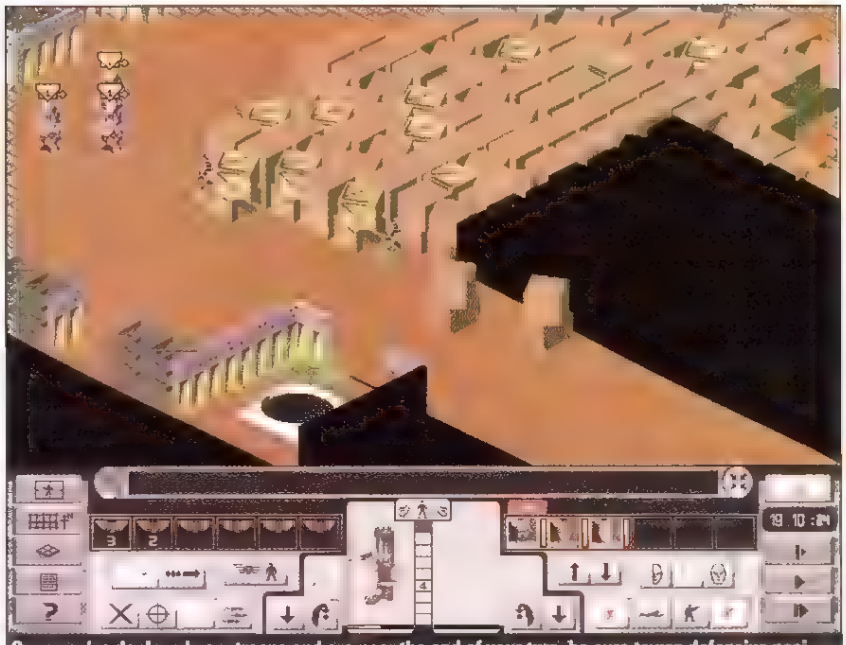
Before rushing off into battle, take a few moments to go ahead and place your first arms order. It takes a few hours for delivery, so you may have to dispatch a response team armed only with their default equipment.

Also, put your scientists to work right away on available projects. Assign biochemists to research the biotech module, and get the quantum physics lab researching the alien's dimension gate. Finally, go ahead and select a site for a second base. It'll be a while before you're able to staff and equip the second base, but you should go ahead and buy the building. We'll discuss these aspects of the game in depth next time. Now you're ready for some close encounters of the violent kind.

ORGANIZING SQUADS

In general, you'll want to follow this basic rule: Hit the enemy with everything you have, as quickly as possible. But since it's critical that you be able to respond to any alien sighting, you must keep some agents healthy at all times. Early in the game, when you're limited to one base, don't send every available agent on a mission. Someone's going to get hurt, and if your entire squad gets shot to pieces, you won't be able to respond to the next alien alert. Dispatch smaller squads — five or six agents for the early missions. They should give you enough firepower to win the battles, and you'll have more healthy agents back at the base to fight with while you let the other agents rest and heal their wounds. If you send every agent on every mission, chances are most will end up wounded, and you'll be forced to ignore alerts or send

The use of squads will help you maintain close tabs on your units in the vast battlefields of *X-COM: Apocalypse*.



Once you've deployed your troops and are near the end of your turn, be sure to use defensive positions to guard against the inevitable alien attack.

wounded agents into combat

You can get away with sending all agents on a mission early in a campaign, but it's a luxury you can't afford for long. Soon after organizations fall under alien influence, you can expect hostile forces to strike at your bases. We'll take a closer look at base defenses in the next issue, but you should always keep four or five agents at home to deal with an assault

HIRING AND FIRING

We'll take a closer look at staff management in the next issue, but for now you should concentrate on getting rid of any weak agents. Your agents will improve through experience and training, but if you have any real dogs on your team, replace them as quickly as possible. Lack of speed, in particular, is a deadly trait for an X-COM agent. If you have an agent with a very low speed rating, you might as well fire him or her and hire someone better qualified Slow agents can't keep up with the rest of the squad in the heat of battle, and they usually die quickly.

EQUIPPING AGENTS

X-COM has a lethal variety of weapons available, and you'll want to adopt a combined-arms approach. Don't focus on a single weapon. A typical squad should have a few laser rifles, a couple of machine guns, an auto-cannon, and a missile launcher. While you want your agents well-armed, don't load them down with everything they can carry. Speed is critical.

GRENADES

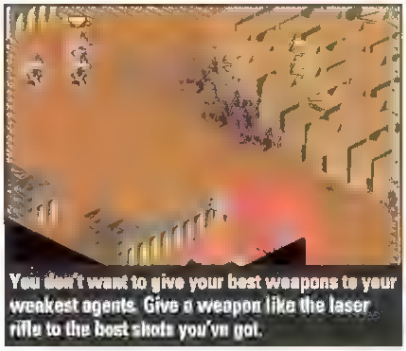
Grenades are perhaps the best arms value in the game. You'll use plenty, so buy all you can find right away. The basic anti-personnel grenade can get your agents out of desperate situations, so each agent should carry several. The stun grenade is essential for capturing live aliens for research. Smoke grenades are ideal for masking an assault or for providing cover for retreating agents Incendiary grenades are great for turning a building into an inferno, but they should be used with discretion Burning down buildings owned by friendly organizations will be expensive, both in terms of reparations and damaged diplomatic ties

MACHINE GUN

The M 400 machine gun is one of your basic firearms. It's most effective used for short range targets, so the weapon is best suited for agents with lower accuracy ratings.

LASER RIFLE

The laser is designed as a sniper rifle, ideal for attacking aliens at long range Don't waste this fine weapon on weak agents with very poor accuracy ratings.



You don't want to give your best weapons to your weakest agents. Give a weapon like the laser rifle to the best shots you've got.

Keep these babies in the hands of your crack shots

AUTO-CANNON

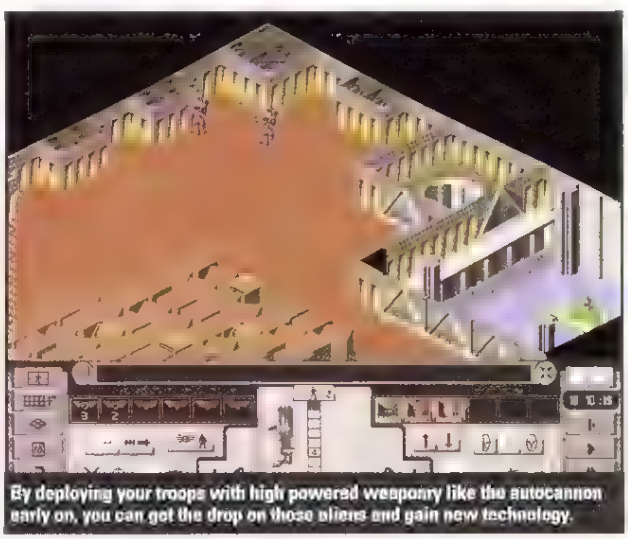
No squad should be without this versatile weapon, which can fire three types of ordnance: armor-piercing, high-explosive, and incendiary. Armor-piercing shells are ideal for close range fights, while explosive and incendiary shells can reduce an enemy organization's building to rubble

MISSILE LAUNCHERS

These weapons, both the mini and heavy varieties, are X COM's big guns, capable of launching both explosive and incendiary missiles. While they're devastating weapons, missile launchers should be used with discretion Unless destroying a building is your mission goal — raiding a hostile organization, for example — you should unleash missiles only in desperate situations. One launcher per squad is usually enough

PISTOLS

It's easy to overlook the old-fashioned pistol, but it can be a valuable part of your arsenal. First, an agent carrying a pistol can use the other hand — for throwing grenades or using a motion scanner — without suffering an accuracy penalty. Still, the conventional pistol should be an agent's last means of defense. The plasma pistol, though, is powerful and versatile. Its long range and powerful punch make it a formidable weapon



By deploying your troops with high powered weaponry like the autocannon early on, you can get the drop on those aliens and gain new technology.

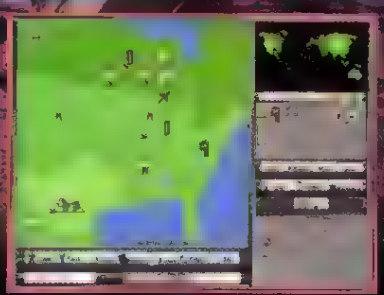
ARMOR

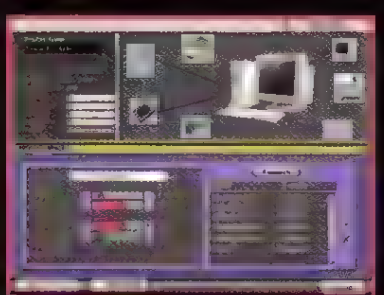
Don't leave home without it. An agent without armor is a dead agent. The basic Marpol armor does the job, but you'll want to upgrade to the Marsec armor as soon as possible. It's expensive, but it's much lighter than the Marpol armor. It also gives agents the ability to fly

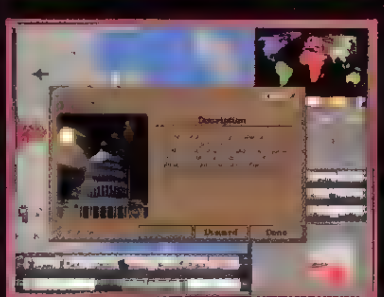
RESPONSE STRATEGY

Most of X-COM's combat occurs in response to reports of alien sightings at a city building. You

Meet The Market Leader







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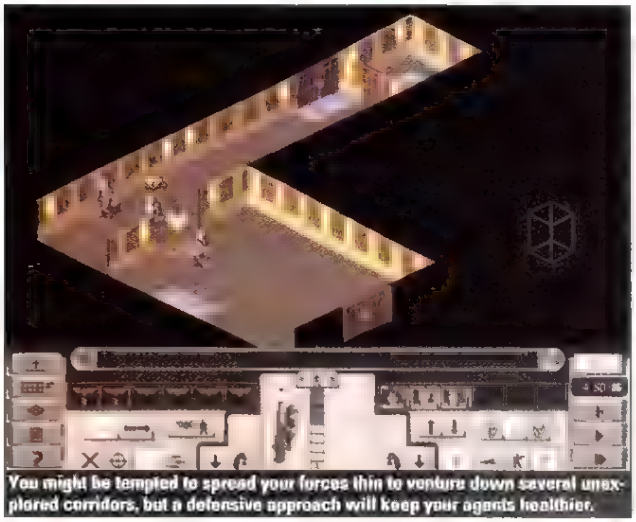


You might be tempted to spread your forces thin to venture down several unexplored corridors, but a defensive approach will keep your agents healthier.

should dispatch squads to all sightings, provided you have at least a handful of healthy agents. But don't limit X-COM missions to just the alien sightings When UFOs are spotted in the city, track them and send squads to investigate buildings near where they land.

It's critical that X COM scientists learn more about alien technology and spacecraft, so capturing a UFO is one of your top priorities early in the game. Watch for word that a UFO has crash landed, and immediately dispatch a squad to the site.

When you're responding to an alien sighting at a building owned by a friendly or neutral organization, try to keep collateral damage to a minimum Razing buildings with incendiary and explosive weapons sure is fun, but destruction of private property tends to upset the building's owner, and can turn a neutral organization against you. And you need all the help you can get

Don't worry, you'll still get to blow up lots of stuff, especially when an organization falls under alien control. When you get word that an organization has gone over to the other side, start planning a little punitive action Bring out the big guns and raid a building owned by the offending organization. Here you should feel free to really shoot up the place, but keep in mind that the more you destroy, the less equipment you'll confiscate when you're done. More importantly, a quick raid on a hostile organization just might bring it back into line

URBAN WARFARE TACTICS

The basic rule for urban warfare against hostile aliens: Get there quickly with as much firepower as you can muster.

Agents are organized into default squads when you arrive on the scene Don't worry about shuffling the squads, since you can do that easily when you enter the building. Smaller groups will keep you busier as commander, but they provide a more flexible and responsive command structure.

Fan out quickly to clear the entry floor, looking for hostiles and locating all elevators and stairwells. If you have three or more squads, have them work different areas and floors of the building until you make contact with the enemy When you find the aliens rush every available agent to the area, trying to move in from different directions if possible

Don't get locked into moving all your agents in squads When you're working your way through narrow corridors, into rooms, and into elevators, send one or two agents ahead as scouts Better to lose one agent to a proximity mine — maybe that real slow guy with the bad eyesight — than to lose an entire squad

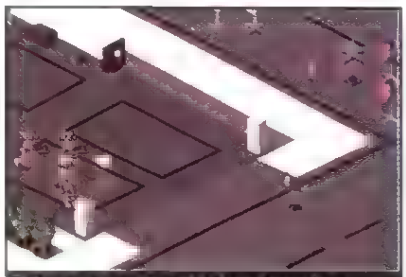
POSITIONING YOUR AGENTS

Walking is okay for a leisurely stroll through a friendly building, but as soon as you spot an alien, put all agents who are in harm's way into run and kneel modes. Agents automatically take advantage of whatever cover is available, but they're much better protected when kneeling When agents come under fire in an open area, order them to run or crawl to cover

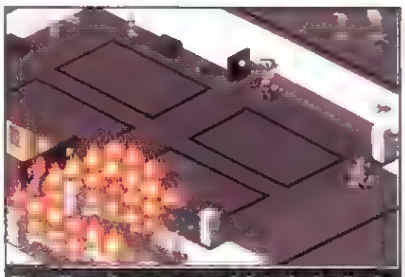
Issuing movement orders by group is convenient when there's no immediate threat, but you should concentrate on individual orders once fighting breaks out. Make sure each agent has some sort of cover, while maintaining a clear line of sight to an enemy unit

Consider each agent's weapons when you're positioning units for battle Agents armed with laser rifles should stay to the rear, where they can best take advantage of the laser's long range The machine gun calls for closer placement. In general, try to engage the enemy at as long a range as possible

Remember, these buildings are real — fires spread and structures come crashing down. If you're not concerned about keeping the building's owner happy, then you can use this to your advantage High explosive shells can



Before you open fire with those incendiary weapons, you might want to consider the damage it could cause to your reputation.



Oh well, maybe you can explain to the landlord that it was really the alien's fault — they shouldn't have made such tempting targets.

Incendiaries and grenades are incredibly effective against large groups of hyperworms. Just be sure to keep your troops well away from the fire zone so they don't take any damage.

As more and more alien craft begin to venture through the dimensional portal, you'll want to keep a tight reign on your interceptor fleet and upgrade often to keep pace with the advances in alien technology.

bring stairwells, catwalks, and ceilings crashing down on anyone — friend or foe — standing below.

RUN FOR COVER

The single most critical objective in any mission — even more important than killing and capturing aliens — is to keep your troops alive. Rookie agents are very poor fighters, but they improve greatly with experience and training. Sure, there are always brave citizens willing to enlist, but they can't replace battle-hardened veterans.

When agents suffer critical wounds, pull them out of harm's way immediately. Separate them from your squad so you can still issue group movement orders. Order them to move to cover and administer first aid. If you don't, they'll die. Often, the agents' overall health will still be strong enough to send them back into the fight after treating the wound.

When an agent is pretty well near death, it's usually wise to order them out of the building. Let the tactical situation dictate this decision. If the outcome of the battle is in doubt — and an extra agent might make the difference — then you might order the injured agent to stay. Otherwise, tell them to get out of the building.

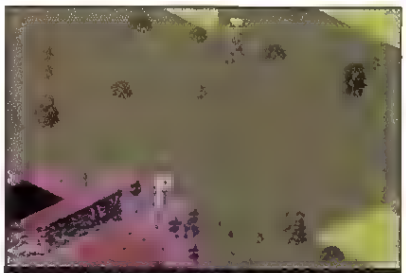
That doesn't mean you should abandon a building lightly. If you pull your forces out before all alien units are eliminated, you lose more than victory points — you also give up all equipment carried by your fallen agents.

CHOKE POINTS

Your objective is to move through a building quickly, killing and capturing aliens before they have a chance to escape. But don't rush blindly through every door and into every elevator.

If you spot an alien moving down a corridor, or detect enemy units with the motion sensor, try to prepare an ambush. Have your agents fan out, taking cover in positions where they can fire on the point where you expect enemy units to appear. If you know that aliens are inside a room, send one agent to open the door, toss a grenade, and run like hell. Any alien that pokes his head through the doorway will be in for an unpleasant surprise.

Take advantage of choke points, such as hallways, entrances, and elevators. If you have enough agents, you might order one squad to cover a key entrance or elevator.



By reserving time units before you end a turn, you might get lucky by having an agent respond with a quick defensive shot at an alien invader.

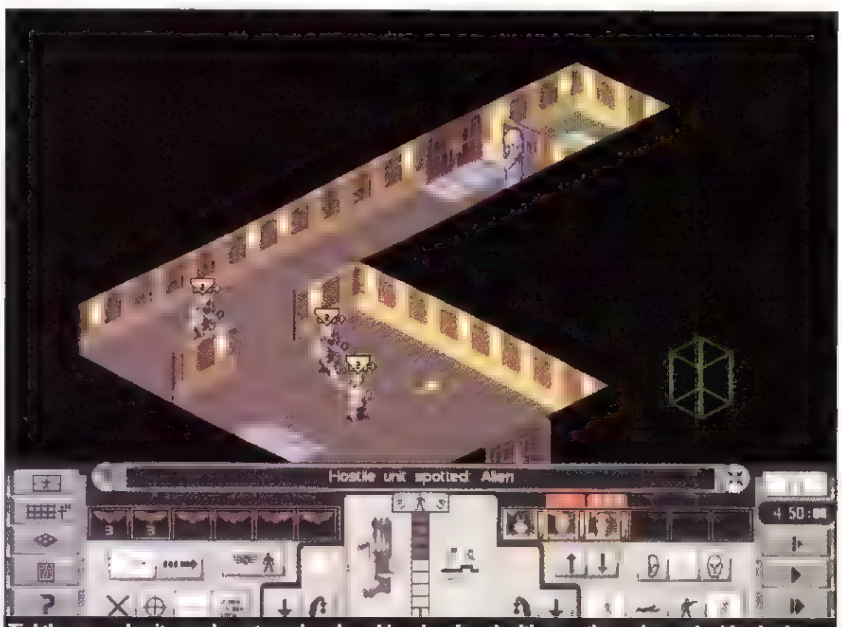
BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE

Sure, your job is to kill aliens, but don't get carried away. You start the game knowing nothing about these creatures. It's up to your scientists to study the aliens to learn about how they live — and how they die. Studying alien creatures will provide the information and the technology you need to win. You must, then, capture a live specimen of every creature you encounter. Unfortunately, capturing aliens isn't as easy as killing them.

Don't worry about capturing aliens until you've researched and built a bio transport module so you can cart them back to the X-COM labs. And don't forget to equip your transport vehicle with the module.

For each mission, make sure each agent carries several stun grenades, and equip at least one agent with a stun grapple. It usually takes a few stun grenades to knock out an alien, and watch out — they wake up after a while. Both the grenades and the grapple are more effective against wounded aliens.

When you first make contact with the enemy during a mission, don't be too concerned about capturing any of the bad guys. Your first priority should



Tightly grouped units can be extremely vulnerable when faced with an anthropod armed with a brain-sucker launcher, as these units will soon find out.

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be eliminating most of the aliens, so let 'em have it. After you've cleared the first group, start thinking about capturing a few aliens. A good candidate for capture is a lone enemy. Order everyone to hold their fire, except for agents armed with stun grapples. Lob stun grenades until the creature is down or taken down with the stun grapple. But be careful — it's easy to get agents killed trying to capture an alien. Be prepared to open fire if any hostiles should try to interrupt the capture.

USING THE MAPS

Mega-Primus is a multi-leveled, 3D environment, and that can make maneuvering between floors a bit confusing at times. That's where the 2D map comes in handy. As your agents search each floor of a building, toggle frequently between the 3D and 2D maps. The 2D map is useful for identifying unexplored areas of a floor, and you can issue order movements to groups and agents on this map.

By assigning squads with a variety of weapons and keeping them grouped defensively, you'll be able to overcome the numerically superior aliens with fewer loses in manpower and hardware.

ALIEN UNITS

Part of the *X-COM* challenge is identifying and researching these bizarre and deadly alien creatures. Here's a look at some of the vile creatures you'll encounter in the game:

BRAINSUCKER

The life span of a Brainsucker is very short, eight hours at most. It has no reproduction or feeding system. Instead it attacks human victims by grasping the head with its claws and inserting its proboscis into the victim's throat. The brainsucker dies immediately after a successful attack, but tests reveal that the victim is subsequently transformed into an alien-controlled entity. The appearance of brainsuckers demands immediate action. The good news is that they're easily killed. When you spot one, make sure two or three agents target it, even if it has already attached itself to someone's noggin. If you're too late and an agent gets his brains sucked, you've got another enemy to worry about.

SPITTER

This loathsome creature's only purpose is to be used in combat. The funnel head propels a liquid containing micro-organisms that secrete acids and enzymes. The large stomach of the creature generates the deadly vomit and would suggest that it sucks up the remains of any victim with its funnel head. Despite their dangerous and disgusting attack, spitters fall fairly easily in combat.

POPPER

The popper runs at high speed toward its victim and explodes when within a range of about five meters. If the Popper is attacked with armor-piercing, incendiary or explosive ammunition then the explosive effect is likely to be triggered. We recommend that other weapons, including laser and plasma fire, be used against this creature in most combat situations. When you spot a popper, immediately pause the action and get ready to run. These guys are lightning-fast and carry a big bang. Order agents to spread out — a single popper can take out an entire squad — and run for cover.

MULTIWORM

This truly hideous creature reproduces quickly, and its newborn immediately devour their mother. The multiworm is extremely tough to kill, and when you finally destroy it, watch out. If it was pregnant — and they usually are — you get some bonus worms. The squirming young worms are fast and vicious. Luckily, they're pretty easy to kill, and they're especially vulnerable to incendiary weapons.

ANTHROPOD

These guys are roughly humanoid in appearance, and their brain size suggests a fairly high level of intelligence. Anthropods are big targets, and they fall quickly under laser and machine-gun fire. Watch out, though, because they're usually armed with brainsucker launchers.

Well, that's it for now! Look for Part Two of the *X-COM: Apocalypse* strategy in next month's issue.

It's a good idea to toggle frequently between 2D and 3D maps to make sure you're not missing anything.

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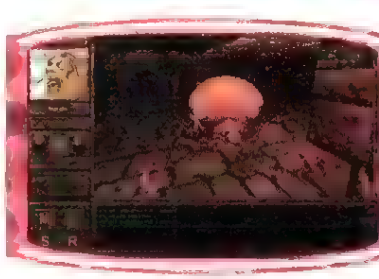

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Tips straight from the developers!

Interactive Magic's latest flight simulation has plenty to keep fighter pilots on their toes, so here's a helpful batch of hints and tips from the company's own testing team.

You can maximize your efficiency in the cockpit by taking advantage of the ability to customize the Multi-Function Displays so they show exactly what you want to see in each mode.

General Flight Tips

• Don't forget that the four MFDs can be preconfigured on the cockpit screen to the way you like it. Try to keep the displays you use most for combat on the top three positions so you don't have to look down in the cockpit to see that fourth MFD.

• When checking your flight path, see if you can alter some of the navigational and patrol waypoints to set your path through less hostile areas and possibly avoid extra SAMS or AAA sites. When in flight, staying below about 400 feet AGL will help avoid SAM sites. Use the radar altimeter to get your AGL altitude.

• When AWACS is available, use them religously! Shut down the radar and track your targets via the LINK. If you have to radiate, do randomly and only long enough to get an accurate picture (a few seconds). Try to avoid long radiating periods.

• If you find yourself low on fuel and need to get back to base, use military power to climb to 45,000 feet then set engines at about 75 percent power. Start your descent about 150 miles from base at idle power and hold about 250 knots in the descent.

• If wingmen fall back and fail to attack a target, order them to "Form on my wing" and then order them to attack the designated target. (Wingmen will react with varying levels of skill.)

• The autopilot will not "automatically" get you to the designated waypoint on time (TOT). Be sure to monitor your speed and closure on the target point so that you can meet your flights/escorts without having to "circle forever and act as target practice for the enemy" right outside the FEBA.

• Be extremely cautious with your airspeed and the autopilot. This becomes important since your IRCS will increase with airspeed. Be sure to consider this in mission planning when reviewing your waypoints and airspeed/altitude. Also, frequently monitor your stealth MFD!

• Speed is everything on landing — be sure to keep airspeed above 150 until just before touchdown — the bird falls like a brick under this speed on the REALISTIC flight model if you so much as bank it 1 degree.

Before a mission, check your flight path for enemy SAM and AAA defenses. Even if you're not on an SEAD mission, you may want to take some HARMs along for safety.

Mission Tips

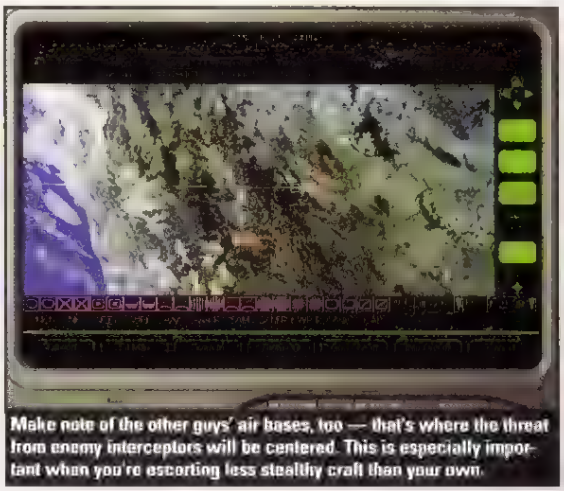
• Before you start a mission, load up at least some of your wingmen with HARMS to knock a path through the enemy defenses. You may want to have a 'Wild Weasel' section and an Air-to-Air section

• Before you start a mission, make sure to examine the Mission Briefing map extremely closely. Check for all possible anti-aircraft fixed positions (SAMS, AAA) in your flight path and be sure to load weapons accordingly. If there is an abundance of SAM sites, try to pack a few HARMS. Keep track of where enemy airfields are as well and be prepared for enemy interceptors if your flight path takes you near any bases.

• On the MAP screen, before takeoff, be sure to "View other flights" (right, center button on map screen) and examine the flights of your escorts and/or those brave soldiers you are protecting. This is essential when, for example, you need to rendevous at WP2 to meet the B 52 forces.

• On missions where external stores are carried, use burner to 'punch through' the Mach barrier and come back to full military power at about Mach 1.05.

• When en route, don't be too quick to attack targets. If you're utilizing LINK and not radiating, those contacts that are possible problems can be tracked via the LINK. Either generate a shoot list, or select the target on the MFD.



Make note of the other guys' air bases, too — that's where the threat from enemy interceptors will be centered. This is especially important when you're escorting less stealthy craft than your own.

Don't forget you can edit your waypoints on the Mission Planning screen. Try to keep above 25,000 feet as much as possible.

The avionics operates the same when radiating, or not radiating and LINKED. First check their altitude relative to yours, then watch how they maneuver. A lot of times the targets are of no concern, and they will pass without you being noticed, especially when their altitude is well below yours. Get too trigger-happy, and you will alert the world to your presence.

• Try to stay above 25,000 feet as much as possible to take advantage of your stealth and stay out of the way of small caliber AAA and SAMs

Working with Wingmen

• Designate targets for wingman and order them to attack. The only way to survive some of the generated campaign missions is to really use your wingman. You *must* give them explicit orders to use them to their fullest effect. Remember, get a shoot list, designate a target for Wing2, and order him/her to attack. If you hear "Missile went Stupid," this implies he missed. Again, get the shoot list and order to attack.

• If you are attempting to attack bandits in SAM country, try to draw them out from the SAM coverage into a more neutral neighborhood and don't send your wingmen in to be slapped by a SAM

• Keep your wingmen alive by watching their tail in multiple bandit encounters (at least until they run out of missiles).

Communicating with your wingman is essential to winning the campaign.

Targeting the Enemy

• When pulling your nose around onto the bandit and the padlock switches to the front view, it is a good idea to quickly relax the stick a little to slow your turn rate because you will usually transition too quickly from lag persuit to lead persuit with the bandit ending up under your nose. This will require another correction and give the bandit more time to execute his own move

• When a missile is inbound, always try to keep it in your forward quarters, close as possible to the nose. Maintain the highest possible closure rate, which will result in less time the missile has to react to your maneuvers. When the missile is in close, dump chaff/flares and make a really radical maneuver that will result in a huge course/altitude solution change for the missile (good ol' vector analysis), thereby throwing him out because he won't be able to maneuver and maintain contact with such a high closure rate. And hopefully the ECM will fool him!

• Be extremely conscious of your weapons loadout and what hardpoints they are loaded on. When selecting AIM-9s in an internal compartment, remember that the doors will open once the missile is selected. This will increase your RCS and probability of detection.

Remember that your bay doors will open when you select a Sidewinder, increasing your radar cross-section and making you a bigger target.

• Look at the color of the smoke from a damaged aircraft. Black smoke means it is on its way to becoming a dead aircraft. White smoke means it is only damaged.

• To get extra range for dropping bombs at low level altitudes, perform a pull-up prior to reaching the target. This way you can egress before reaching the target area and avoid area defenses.

When it's time to land, speed is everything. Keep it above 150 knots until just before touchdown if you want to see this view of the runway — as opposed to watching it fly up and smite you.

Multi-player

• When navigating to the next waypoint, rather than trying to keep close station on the leader, try the autopilot. First ensure everyone has the same next waypoint selected on the Nav MFD. Then move out to maybe a mile from the leader and/or other wingmen, then all of you turn on your autopilot. This way everyone will be going to the same waypoint and will maintain the same airspeed and altitude automatically. Then you can relax a little, enjoy the scenery or keep closer tabs on the MFDs and comm messages. But be advised that everyone is converging on the same checkpoint. Turn off the autopilot before you all collide. When past the checkpoint just spread out and do it again.

[*Editor's Note*: Thanks to Jim "Plata" Pedicord, Steven J. Chmura, Terry Yingling, Evan Nau, and "Cowboy" Bill Wilson for these hints.]

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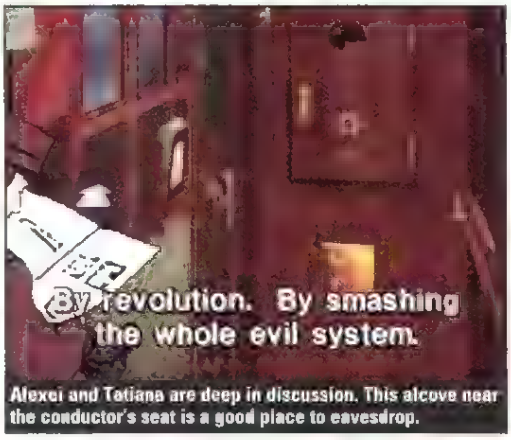
The Last Express, Part 3

Are you ready to finish *The Last Express*? Then read on!

Well, we're now at the third and final CD of this mysterious adventure. Things are going to get pretty dangerous near the end, so stick closely to this strategy provided to us by Jordan Mechner of Smoking Car Productions. You're going to need these expert tips in order to finish the game! And remember, if you missed the first two parts of this complete walkthrough, just check out the August and September issues of *PC Gamer*.

Second Night — Vienna to Budapest

You start out in the dining car. Walk downtrain to the Red sleeping car. Anna rings for the conductor and gives him a message (canceling dinner with August), which he heads to the dining car to deliver. You can take this opportunity to check out the sketchbook under the conductor's seat (He's been sketching passengers for the entire journey now, and his sketchbook is almost full). Walk down to the back of the train. In place of Kronos' car there is now a baggage car. (There's nothing to do in the baggage car... yet.) Alexei is loitering around in the space between cars. After a few minutes, Tatiana joins him. Wait by the conductor seat to eavesdrop on Alexei and Tatiana's passionate argument about anarchism and Russian politics. If you walk in on them, though, they will stop talking until you leave. Their conversation ends after the train stops in Poszony at 8:08 p.m.



Alexei and Tatiana are deep in discussion. This alcove near the conductor's seat is a good place to eavesdrop.

Go to the Red sleeping car and visit Anna's compartment (compartment F) for a bitter discussion of the meaning of duty, friendship, etc. Meanwhile, the first dinner service ends; August, Abbot, Ivo, Salko, and the Boutarel family all return to their compartments; the conductors start making the beds.

After 8:40, you can eavesdrop on Sophie and Rebecca at dinner for an insight into Sophie's views on marriage. You may also want to take advantage of this opportunity to slip into their compartment (E in the Red car), read the latest installment of Rebecca's diary (under her pillow), and even climb out their window to spy on Anna resting in her compartment (although depending on when you do it, Anna's shades may be drawn).

Meanwhile, in the salon, August (after getting stood up by Anna) has ordered himself a whole bottle of brandy. Once he is good and buzzed, click to join him for a drink. He proves a jolly companion.

It's almost time for bed. Return to your own compartment (1 in the Green car). Tatiana is loitering in the corridor. As soon as you enter, she knocks. Open up. She reveals a secret — Alexei is a mad bomber. When she leaves, use the pass key to slip through the washroom into Alexei's compartment. Search his luggage; there's a detonator in his suitcase. Take it. Before you can get away, Abbot walks in, surprising both of you. Return to your own compartment and sleep... perchance to dream...

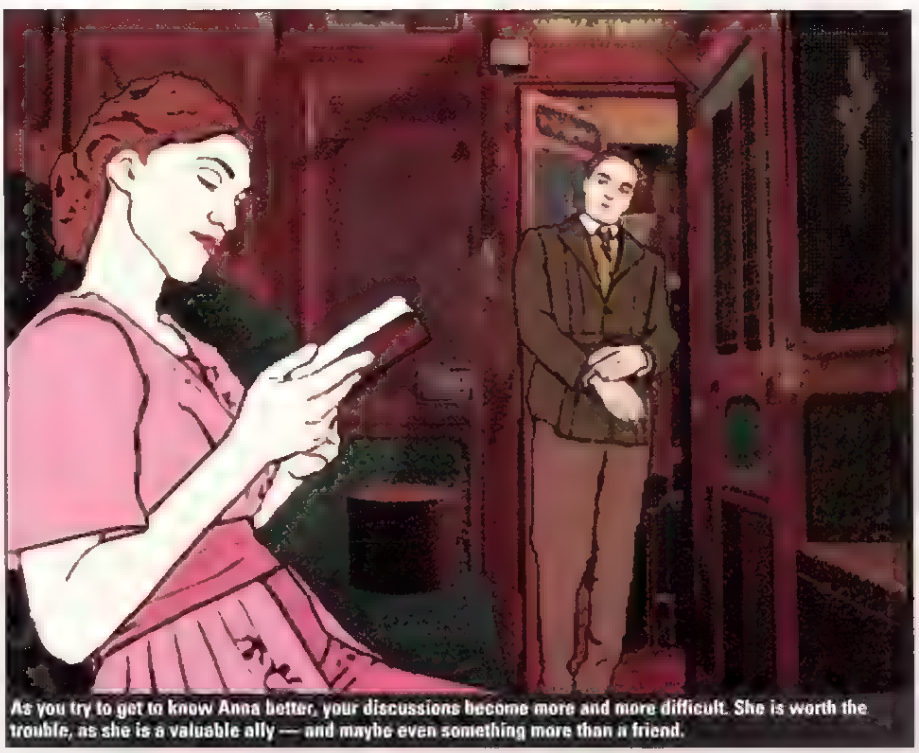
Tatiana has told you that Alexei is planning to bomb the train. Check out his compartment right away; you'll find the detonator in his suitcase. Take it with you.

You wake up at 10:30 from a bizarre dream about Vassili and Tatiana. Go check out Vassili's compartment (A in the Red car). It was no dream; Alexei's been stabbed to death. Listen carefully to Alexei's dying words... something about a clock.

In the corridor, Abbot gives instructions to the Trainmaster, then invites you for a drink in the smoking car. Don't follow him! Instead, walk downtrain to the end of the Red car. Hear that ticking? It's coming from the electrical cabinet by the conductor's seat.

Defusing the Bomb

Open the lower cabinet. Note that the fuse box door is open. Close it to reveal a cigar box wedged behind it. Slide the cigar box up. It is attached to the pipe by two wires. Careful! If you click on it again, you'll pull out the wires and detonate the bomb. Instead, use the match


As you try to get to know Anna better, your discussions become more and more difficult. She is worth the trouble, as she is a valuable ally — and maybe even something more than a friend.

That's the bomb on the left in the cigar box behind the small door panel. Once you open the cigar box, insert your telegram between the relays to prevent the bomb from exploding.

(striking it on the pipe) to burn through the insulation, then twist the exposed wires together and safely remove the box. You will now see a close-up of the cigar box. Don't open it! Instead, turn the box around and click on one of the hinges to open the box from behind, revealing the ticking clock mechanism. (Alexei took the clock from the salon and used it to replace the detonator you stole from him.) Last, insert the telegram between the relays to defuse the bomb.

Abbot repeats his offer of a drink. Now, you can take him up on it. Go to the smoking car and wait for him. (Anna is drinking alone in the corner.) When Abbot arrives and sits down, click on him. In the midst of your conversation, Anna leaves. Follow her back to her compartment. After she goes into her compartment, enter without knocking. Just as things are starting to heat up... bam! You're captured by Serbian revolutionaries who have hijacked the train.

Runaway Train

You wake up bound and gagged on the floor of the baggage car. Wriggle around (e.g. click left, then down, then up) to try to sit up. Matches fall out of your pocket. Grope around on the floor behind your back to pick up a match and use it to burn through the ropes. Stand up and open the door. Ivo enters.

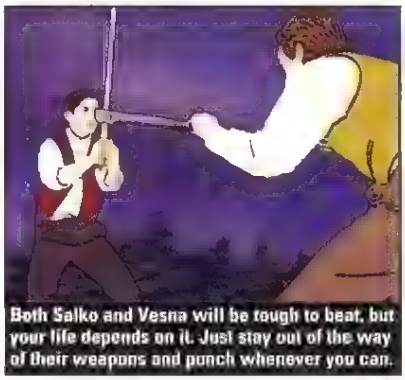
Slug it out with Ivo. When you see him start to swing, move the cursor to the lower half of the screen (it becomes a backwards arrow) and click to dodge. When Ivo swings and misses, move the cursor back up (it becomes a left or right fist cursor) and click to counter-punch. After you have hit him enough times, he will fall down.

Go through the door, untie Anna, and head uptrain. Climb up to the roof

Those pesky Serbian revolutionaries are up to their old tricks. Don't worry — with some fighting and a little luck, you'll be able to escape.

of the train at the rear of the Green car and move forward towards the locomotive. When you reach the restaurant car, Salko climbs up and attacks you. He's got a crowbar but is easy to beat. As soon as he starts to swing with the crowbar, move the cursor down and click (backwards arrow) to dodge. Then, while Salko is still off balance, click (fist cursor) to punch him in the face. When you've hit him three times, he becomes dazed. Dodge one more time, then click (open hand cursor) to grab the crowbar and push Salko off the train.

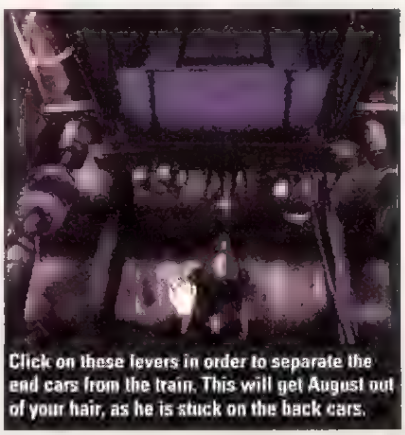
After beating Salko, turn around. Vesna has a sword; you have a crowbar. This is the toughest of all the fights in *The Last Express,* so be patient. Vesna has two attacks: a thrust (she draws her arm back and lunges) and a slash (she raises the sword high above her head and brings it down). Watch her carefully to see which attack she uses each time. If she thrusts, move the cursor low (it becomes a backwards arrow) and click


Both Salko and Vesna will be tough to beat, but your life depends on it. Just stay out of the way of their weapons and punch whenever you can.

to dodge. If she slashes, move the cursor high (it becomes an up arrow) and click to block upwards with the crowbar. You must match your defense to her attack, otherwise you're dead. Only after a successful thrust and dodge (not after a slash) can you click with the fist cursor to hit Vesna in the face with the crowbar. The name of the game here is survival. After a certain length of time, Vesna will suddenly hit the deck. This means a tunnel is coming. Quickly move the cursor low (down arrow) and click to duck yourself. The train goes into the tunnel... and when it emerges, Vesna makes a mistake that seals her own fate.

After beating Vesna, go downtrain (away from the locomotive) to the end of the restaurant car and climb down. Enter the dining room and free the passengers and crew who are imprisoned there. You wind up in the sleeping car, as the Trainmaster and conductors rush around trying to get all the passengers to return to their compartments.

NOTE: If, by any chance, you left the Firebird or the whistle in the chest in Tyler's compartment, now is your last chance to retrieve them! The best place for the Firebird is in Max's cage in the baggage car; the best place for the whistle is in your pocket. (If you followed last issue's walkthrough for the second CD, these objects will already be where you want them, and you have nothing to worry about.) If you didn't get the whistle from Francois earlier, you have another chance now: It's


Click on these levers in order to separate the end cars from the train. This will get August out of your hair, as he is stuck on the back cars.

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lying where Francois dropped it in the exodus from the restaurant, under the corner seat as you enter the salon. Pick it up.

The sleeping cars are full of panicked passengers and crew hiding in the compartments. They're fun to listen to, but no help to anyone. Might as well cut them loose. Stop in between the restaurant car and Red sleeping car; look down and lift the metal floor plates to reveal a hook-and-eye connection between the cars. Click to separate the cars. August shows up just in time to say good-bye.

Mini Train

The train now consists of just the locomotive, baggage car, and restaurant car. Climb back to the top and head to the locomotive for your final confrontation with Milos. Anna appears just in time and shoots Milos, saving your life

The train is slowing down. If you let it come to a complete stop, the Austrians win, and the game is over. Don't let the train stop! Instead, click on the lever to restart the train. You will ignore Anna's pleas to stop; the train crashes through the border checkpoint, is diverted onto an old track, and crosses a rickety wooden bridge that collapses behind it, stranding the pursuing Serbian army train on the other side.

Your job is done. Return to the train. Vassili and Tatiana are still in the dining room, both insane. Click on Tatiana for a glimpse into her terrifying inner world. Then, head to the baggage car. Anna is waiting in the personnel compartment (the door on your left just before the Trainmaster's office). Enter to talk to her; one thing leads to another, and another, and... before you know it, it's 36 hours later and the train is almost in Constantinople.

Your old pal Kronos is back, and he wants that Firebird bad. Give it to him, or it will cost Anna's life.

As the train pulls out of the station, you notice a familiar-looking private car stopped on a siding. Uh oh. Go down to the restaurant car. Entering the salon, you find Kronos and Kahina waiting for you; Anna is their hostage. Kronos directs you to bring him the Firebird. Do it. Retrieve the Firebird from Max's cage and bring it back (if you take too long, Kahina will whack you).

Kronos then instructs you to open the Firebird. If you read last issue's CD 2 walkthrough, you already know how to do this. Rotate the egg to click the five gems in the sequence prescribed by the poem: Australia (turquoise gem), England (blue gem), Nepal (red gem), Easter Island off the coast of South America (purple gem), Jerusalem (green gem). Stick your finger in the hole that opens up, and the Firebird emerges. Anna plays her violin to "make it sing."

After the Firebird has sung, Kronos suddenly looks out the window and notices it's sunset. (Remember what happened to the Sultan in the story?) Kronos orders you to close the egg. Don't do it! Instead, take the whistle out of your pocket and blow. This, your last action of the game, will trigger... well, we hate to give it away, so you'll just have to finish the game to find out!

Turns out that Milos would rather shoot you than deal with you. It looks like you've had it this time for sure, until Anna shows up in time to save your life — again!

Once the Firebird is alive, it takes a deep disliking to Kronos. Get off the train quick, or you could be next.

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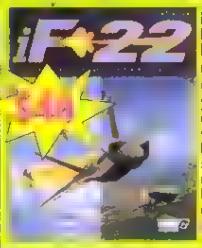

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41170 Id Anthology	118
39513 Incredible Machine 3.0	33
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Screamin 3D	189
Sidewinder 3D PRO Joystick	42
Sidewinder 3D PRO w/Hellbender	40
Sound Blaster AWE64 Gold	209
Space Orb 360	75
Sportster 33.6 External	159
Sportster 33.6 Internal	139
Sportster 56K Internal Fax/Modem	200
Sportster 56K Internal Voice F/M	220
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Stealth 3D 2000 2MB Upgrade	40
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Thrustmaster ACM Game Card	23
Thrustmaster F-16 FLCS	120
Thrustmaster F-22 Pro	128
Thrustmaster Rudder Pedals	112
Thrustmaster TQS for FLCS	115
Thrustmaster WCS Mark	04
Thrustmaster X-Fighter	44
Wavetorce DB50XG Daughterboard	133

N '95 ENTERTAINMENT

20th Century Trivia Challenge	24
688 Hunter/Killer	47
A-10 Cuba	27
Advanced Tact Fighters Gold	47
Air Warrior II	49
Amber: Journeys Beyond	42
Armed And Delirious NYR	45
Balls of Steel	34
Beavis & Butthead: Dorks	20
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	39
Brain Food Games	38
Caesar II	50
Capitalism Plus 2.0	46
Chaos Overlords	20
Chessmaster 5000	35

WIN '95 ENTERTAINMENT

43903 Close Combat	38
43581 Command & Conquer CD	41
44560 Conquest of the Skies	45
47923 Creatures	35
44561 Crow: City of Angels	39
46018 Dark Reign: Future of War NYR	46
46463 Daytona USA	41
48102 Deadlock II	47
45675 Descent II: Infinite Abyss	28
44581 Destruction Derby 2	26
43300 Diablo	42
44137 Die Hard Trilogy	50
46073 Director's Chair	48
44582 Discworld 2	44
45627 Divide: Enemies Within NYR	29
41022 Doom II: Hell on Earth	24
45362 Dr Brain IV: Time Warp	36
35231 Dragon's Lair II	26
45055 Dungeon Keeper	47
44583 Ecstatica 2	47
47516 Entertainment Pack: Puzzle Ed	29
44125 F/A-18 Hornet	41
46885 Fable	29
34272 Falcon NYR	65
47350 Fallen Haven	27
20969 Fallout	50
42586 Family Card Games	5
48075 Fighters Anthology	47
47053 Fischer's Erotic Encyclopedia	36
46076 Flight Sim. Expans on Pack	29
44584 Formula 1	44
45056 Gene Wars	35
44511 Golf Courses: Mauna Kea	22
46074 Goosebumps: Horrorland	38
45610 Grand Slam '97	44
48099 Gubble	27
48104 Hardball 5 Enhanced	16
45895 Hardball 6 NYR	47
45497 Harpoon '97	36
47882 Heavy Gear NYR	47
41116 Hexen	22
47883 Hexen II	51
41844 HyperBlade	27
47551 Imperialism	36
44411 Interstate '76	47
46446 Jack Nicklaus 4	45
27422 Kick Off '97	40
47552 LEGO Island	36
41123 Lemmings Paintball	20
47695 Links LS 1998 Edition	46
44229 M1A2 Tank: Abrams	49
37926 Magic: The Gathering	45
41354 MechWarrior 2	27
46928 MechWarrior 2 Battle Pack	47

WIN '95 ENTERTAINMENT

47741 MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries 3DFX	47
45201 Meridian 59	20
41149 Microleague Baseball	35
44496 Monster Truck Madness	38
44969 NASCAR II	50
44566 NBA Jam Extreme	35
48072 NCAA Football 98	45
45682 NFL Legends of Football 98	41
46961 Need for Speed II	47
44502 Neverhood	48
45892 Obsidian	36
44403 Outlaws	52
41464 PBA Bowling	29
22228 PGA Tour Pro	46
47455 POD	44
45235 Pacific General	45
45238 Panzer General	20
43057 Panzer General: 97 NYR	44
44958 Phantasmagoria 2	59
46920 Professional League of Pain	31
47886 Quake 2 NYR	52
43383 Rise & Rule: A. Empires	30
41232 Road Rash	35
46129 Rocket Jockey	26
45160 Screamer 2	24
40726 Shanghai: Great Moments	19

WIN '95 ENTERTAINMENT

45024 Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye	19
40775 SimCity 2000 Collection	39
43607 SimCity 2000 Special Edition	4
41859 SimClassic Collection II	30
45724 SimCopter	25
47107 SimPark	35
41987 Solitaire Deluxe	26
45977 Sonic	32
47142 Space Station Simulator	32
40123 SpaceWard Ho! IV	18
41073 Spycraft: The Great Game	27
41255 Star Control III	28
43091 Star General	44
40220 Star Trek: Generations	52
48127 Stratajams	25
47144 Streets of SimCity NYR	41
48109 Super Bubsy	21
44572 Super Motocross NYR	33
45057 Syndicate Wars	47
46986 Theme Hospital	43
39460 Thexder	25
42246 Time Commando CD	27
47650 Tony LaRussa Baseball 4	42
40639 Tri-Tryst	25
25364 Triple Play '98	45

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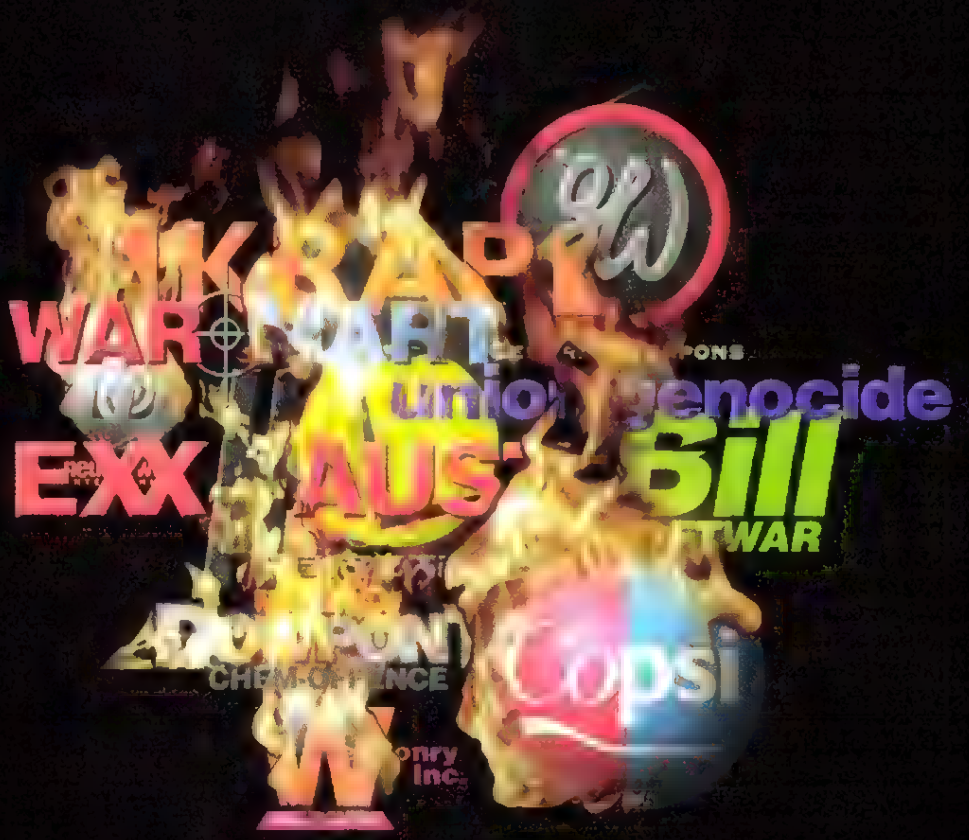

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Readers' Requests

Having trouble getting through your favorite games? Lucky for you, the Strategy Central crew has the solutions you need!

Like any art, computer gaming requires both intense mental focus and an incredible degree of hand/eye coordination. You must *be one* with the game, *become* the joystick, *be* the monkey, and, after hours of studious dedication, you shall find yourself, O Initiate, on the road to Gaming Zen.

But who has time for all that? Type in some cheat codes and take the shortcut to Nirvana! You know you want to.

Shivers: Harvest of Souls

I hope you can help me! I am stuck in *Shivers: Harvest of Souls*. One of the puzzles I'm having trouble with is getting the keys to the library out of the cash register. I know the keys are in there, but I can't get the keys out of the cash register, because the cash register won't open. Thanks for all your helping hands!

—Amy Lin, *Irvine, CA*

Well Amy, to get the keys out of the register you're going to have to rattle someone's cage! First, go over to the snake cage and look at the snake. The snake will shake its rattle at you. Go outside, take a walk around, visit a couple of other buildings, then go back into the market. When you return, the snake will be gone, and in its place you'll see a water bowl in the snake cage. At the bottom of the bowl are some numbers: **12x89#417**.

Type these numbers into the cash register and it will pop right open, but the key's still hidden. Click on the closed portion of the drawer and inside you'll find the missing key. Hope that helps!

The Neverhood

Help! I'm a big fan of claymation, but I can't figure out the puzzles in *The Neverhood Chronicles*! In fact, I'm rather embarrassed, because I can't even get out of the first room! There's some gymnast rings, and if I pull on one of the rings, the door opens, but as soon as I let go of the ring, the door closes!

— "Loud Larry," *via the Internet*

It's a friendly day in the Neverhood, ha ha. If you're having trouble getting out of the house in The Neverhood, *pull up a chair and take notes. First, push the big plant (It's a Venus Flytrap) under the fourth ring from the left. Jump up and grab the ring, than let go, and the Flytrap will grab the ring and get stuck on it. This will hold the door open and let you go out into the world and explore.*

Interstate '76

I've found a neat little easter egg in *Interstate '76* when I finished it. I was looking at the car selection screen when I was about to duel Antonio, when I noticed a little flying helicopter at the top left of the selection screen. I thought what the heck and clicked it, and it worked! I fought Antonio the first time and won! With twin Dr. Radar missiles he was easy to finish off! Plus the fender cam looks awesome!

—Jordan Rader, *Bloomfield, IN*

Thanks for the neat trick! That should help our hard-driving readers fix Malachio for good!

To take out Malachio with ease, follow Jordan Rader's smart tips.

Cheater's Corner

MDK

Does it stand for *Murder Death Kill? Macho Donkey Kong? Monkeys Don't Knit?* Regardless, the game is a cult classic, the first of what we hope will be many games from Shiny Entertainment, and a title that has kept many a young monkey up past their bed time scratching their fuzzy little heads over some of the game's tougher puzzles. Here's some top secret cheat codes to get you kick-started. Hit the [illegible] key and type the codes in at the help screen, then hit escape again to continue playing. These codes work once per level!

[illegible] — Fixes up your Health.

[illegible] — Gives you a Gatling powerup.

[illegible] — Gives you a Twister powerup.

[illegible] — Gives you a sniper grenade powerup.

[illegible] — Gives you a Super Chain Gun powerup.

[illegible] — Don't try this one!

Capitalism Plus

Lately I've been re-acquainting myself with the world of high finance, via *Capitalism Plus* from Interactive Magic. For those who were familiar with the old *Capitalism*, rest assured, very little has changed. As such, I discovered that my tried-and-true path to riches is still very viable. I call this my "Sealy Posturepedic Strategy."

Since in real life, I'm an Economics minor, I know there are two ways to maximize the profit margin: 1) Have the monopoly on a highly desirable commodity, and 2) have control of the production of that commodity from the raw material stage all the way through to distribution to the final consumer. (In Economics, the latter concept is called "vertical integration".) In *Capitalism Plus*, this will entail 1) sole ownership of every source of one or more raw materials for a certain product, 2) ownership of at least one factory capable of manufacturing that product, 3) ownership of at least one department store [preferably in a city where the local competitors are selling at a high price, but with minimal quality], and 4) enough money to accomplish the first three requirements. If you're smart, early on you'll also use your character's start-up $1 million to buy up your own company's stock at $10/share, then have the company buy back the rest of the outstanding shares. That way, the only person who profits from your efforts is you.

Start the game. Set up the initial parameters like so: For starters, pick the Standard Gameset. Number of competi-

Cheater's Corner

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II

"Sir Joseph of Novicki, you have embarked on a new quest!" Ever since New World Computing's *Heroes of Might and Magic II* came out, our disc editor Joe Novicki has been glued to his monitor screen, lost in a little world of elves, goblins, and red-capped garden gnomes. So, when he wasn't looking, we went over and pinned this list of cheat codes to his back.

If you're not in a town and you've got a slot open, this cheat code will give you five surly, evil Black Dragons to do your bidding.

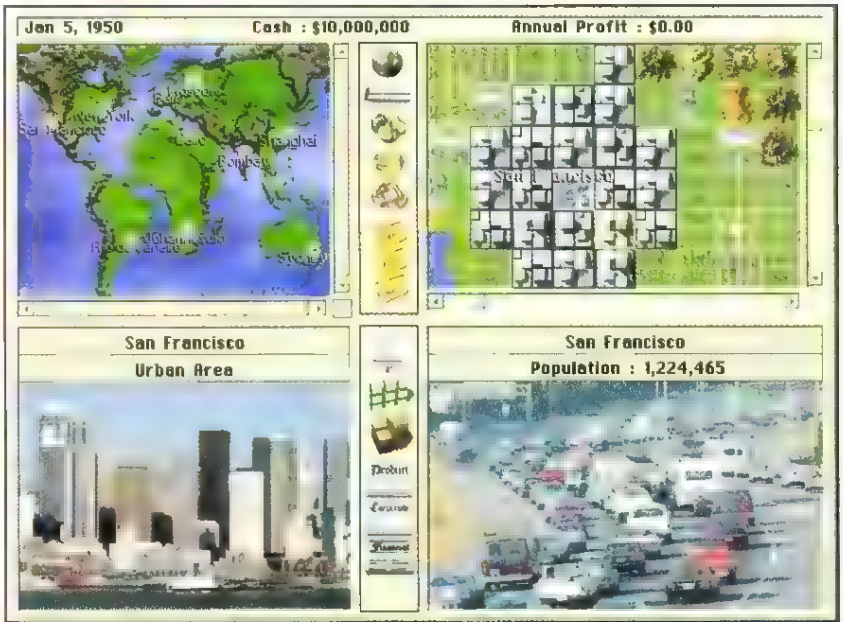
"Jenny, Jenny, I got your number..." This cheat code, named for a 1980s pop song, will unveil the entire map.

This code is for the impossibly impatient or the hopelessly inept; it allows you to win immediately.

This cheat code will make you lose immediately. Type it in during your friend's game when she's not looking.

This easy-to-remember code will give your troops some more luck.

Use the secret code "32167" to add Black Dragons to your prowling army.



If you follow one reader's advice and corner the market on bedroom furnishings, you'll have one sure-fire way to fiscal success in *Capitalism Plus!*

tors: maximum. Competitors' starting capital: maximum. Number of cities to start: maximum. Competitor characters: very aggressive. Competitor expertise: high. Competence of local competitors: high. Definitely allow stock investment. Number of seaports to start: zero, none, nada. And make sure that there will always be only that many. Given these parameters, your difficulty factor will be 200 percent, assuring that you'll either die early on, or else end up with one hell of a score. Rest easy, the beauty of this strategy is that if you follow it properly, it won't matter how tough the competition is because you'll be the only player in your selected market.

Now comes the only difficult phase: It is mandatory that you acquire all of the Timber resources in your particular world. Once you've actually started the game, immediately freeze the clock. Locate all of the Timber resources on the game map, taking note of the purchase price of each. If the price tag for all of them combined is under $10 million — less than that is even better — you can keep that map. If not, quit the game and start another with a new map, but all the other parameters remaining the same.

Once you've bought up all the Timber, you will be the only competitor that will be able to make and market 1) Beds, 2) Sofas, and 3) Anything requiring Paper, such as Cigarettes or Diapers. Go to the most centrally located Timber source (ignore Quality for now) and set up your Logging Camp.

Now go to the nearest city, and on the near side set up a Factory. (The placement will minimize your transportation costs.) Eventually, your layout will be one Purchasing Unit, dead center, with two flanking Sales Units, either left-and-right or above-and-below. The other six slots will of course be Manufacturing Units. For now, just set up the Purchasing Unit, one Manufacturing Unit, and one Sales Unit. Start the clock. When the Logging Camp's Sales Unit shows product for sale, switch to the Factory's Purchasing Unit and link it to the Logging Camp's Sales Unit. Now watch the Factory; when the Sales Unit shows product in stock, stop the clock. Move your view to the nearby city map and find the most expensive piece of real estate there. ("Location, location, location!") Set up a department store there, but for now set up only one Ad Unit, dead center, with one Purchasing Unit, either left or right, or above or below. Eventually, there will be two Purchasing Units, and six Sales Units, and believe it or not, they'll all be selling Beds — just Beds. And the reason for that is that the Necessity Index for Beds is a whopping 50 percent — and aside from the local competitors, you're the only choice of the sleeping public.

This pretty much covers the "Sealy Posturepedic Strategy." If you stick to Beds, you should be in every city within two years, and you should have your first billion dollars within ten years.

Now that you've digested this strategy, you might want to just sleep on it before putting it into play.

—**Alex Foley**, *Westchester, IL*

Thanks for the advice Alex, including the many other finer points we didn't have room to print. Good job cornering the market on beds, and congratulations, your little bit of economic insight has made you our Tip of the Month Club October winner! Expect a package of Gaming Goodness™ to be coming your way real soon!

PCG

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Do you know the secrets to every PC game ever made? Want to share your love of gaming with the world? Then Strategy Central wants you for The Tip of the Month Club.

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LETTERS

Hey, everybody! It's our October issue, so it's only right that we should have an especially spooky letters page. Unfortunately, the letters we got this month weren't scary — no more so than usual, anyway — so that idea's out. What we *do* have is a spicy melange of elegant epistles from the usual assortment of intelligent, insightful, and incredibly attractive *PC Gamer* readers. Enjoy!

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Getting Real

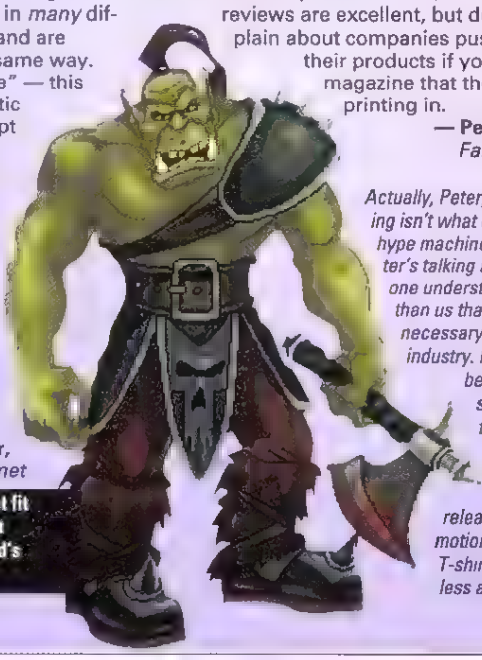
Dan Bennett is so right on the mark about "Realism" (Sim Column, p. 250, July issue). I've been trying to find a flight game like LucasArts' old *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* — not with better performance, just better graphics. Few of us have or even could fly a real combat aircraft into combat and live to tell about it. In fact, few career combat pilots ever get a confirmed kill. The die-hard "realism" jokers out there that make all the noise are probably the ones also complaining about not being able to "save" the game just before shooting starts.

— Ronald N. Fick,
USN retired, Livingston, MT

Orc Retort

In response to Mark Hajos' letter condemning Blizzard's Orcs in the August issue: As *PCG* pointed out, "Orcs" are not an idea limited to a single portrayal. Tolkien was neither the first nor the last to use orcs. Orcs (as well as dragons, goblins, trolls, etc.) appear in *many* different books, games, etc.; and are hardly ever portrayed the same way. As for a "full artistic license" — this is fantasy! If not a full artistic license on a general concept in fantasy, then where? Each person has a right to view imaginary characters in a way totally opposite from others' views. "Honorable" Orcs do go against the best-known portrayal, but not some other author's portrayal — namely, the whole concept of orcs built by Blizzard in the first two WarCraft games.

— Logan Harper,
via the Internet



Honorable orcs? They might not fit into Tolkien's Middle Earth, but they're right at home in Blizzard's WarCraft universe.

Imperium Galactica was one of those rare surprises; a good game that wasn't hyped to death long before release.

Hype Gripe

In your July issue, William Trotter said in his review of *Imperium Galactica* that it was "refreshing to cover a game without first having to endure months of breathless hype." Where is all this "hype" coming from? Not from TV, but from all of the software magazines that have one page of advertisements for every page of information. Sure, I love your demo CD, and your reviews are excellent, but don't complain about companies pushing their products if you are the magazine that their ad is printing in.

— Peter Brady,
Fairview, UT

Actually, Peter, advertising isn't what drives the hype machine Col. Trotter's talking about; no one understands better than us that ads are a necessary part of the industry. It's the behind-the-scenes hype that can be tiresome: floods of press releases, promotional videos, T-shirts, countless alpha and beta versions of games sent out many months before the final product's release. Hey, we love getting free stuff as much as anyone, but it doesn't make a game any more or less likely to get preview coverage or a good review, and sometimes it's refreshing to come across a good game that's been allowed to stand on its own merits, without the help of the hype machine.

One Step at a Time

I have heard a lot of people talking about how their computers can't run new games a year and a half after they bought them, but I have had this problem since I buy my computer parts at intervals, not just in one huge chunk.

I first bought a six-speed CD-ROM drive for 60 bucks, then a few months later, bought a new motherboard, a video card, a hard drive, a sound card, a network card, a modem, and some RAM. At the end of this, I had a Cyrix 6x86 166+ with 16MB of RAM, a 1.6GB hard drive, a 2MB Trident video card, a 16-bit sound card, and a six-speed CD-ROM

drive. The whole upgrade only cost me about $700, because I built it all myself. My advice to someone who isn't an expert in building computers is to buy a bare-bones computer at the start, with a good processor, hard drive, and CD-ROM drive, a moderate amount of RAM, and an okay video card. And don't buy from someone who makes a non-upgradeable motherboard, buy from a local guy who can make a computer that you want. Don't pay more than $1,250 for this com puter, because in the coming months you're going to upgrade it. When the months go by, ask yourself what are the hot technologies out there: are 3D cards cheaper then they were when you bought your computer, or have DVD prices gone down? Besides going to a local store, you can get good deals at a computer show. When I upgraded my computer, the price of the Diamond Stealth 3D card had just gone down to $100 at the local computer show, and I picked one up. I still see prices for that card in the $150 range.

— Stuart S. F. Becktell, *via the Internet*

Good advice, Stuart. Upgrading a piece at a time is really the way to go, as long as you're not afraid to dig into your PC's guts every once in a while — and it's really a lot simpler than it sounds. That's the strategy we recommended in our "Ultimate Game Machine" feature way back in July 1996, and it's something we'll be address-ing again very soon.

Check in with us next month for a feature addressing how to upgrade your PC to a powerful gaming machine. The Hard Stuff will pick it up from there with a new, ongoing, ultimate machine page in which we let gamers know which of the newest, greatest components and peripherals are essen-tial for a serious gaming PC.

Of course, there'll always be gamers who'd rather pay for an all-inclusive system rather than break out the screwdriver every few months, and we'll continue addressing their needs, too.

PCG

Separated at Birth?

Never let it be said that PC gamers aren't an astute lot. Our readers pick up on connections that even we don't always notice.

Maybe it's just me, but doesn't the drawing of Hiro Miyamoto in the *Daikatana* Scoop (August 1997) have the same face as John Romero?! I think so. It's actually kinda creepy....

— D. Hartl, Traverse City, MI

Did you notice that Hiro Miyamoto, *Daikatana*'s main character, looks suspiciously similar to John Romero?

— Rafael Torres, via the Internet

readers RESPOND

Say what you will about the cover of the August 1997 *PC Gamer*, but it certainly garnered a lot of attention with its image of *Tomb Raider 2* heroine Lara Croft. Some readers objected to Lara's summery beach ensemble; others said Lara didn't belong on our cover at all — and still others loved the image and wondered where they could get their own copies of it. Next month, Duke Nukem in a Speedo....

"The August edition of *PC Gamer* had the best cover art ever. I've been reading *PC Gamer* for about three years, and this cover with Lara Croft, *Tomb Raider*'s lovely heroine, is by far the best."

"The cover of the current *PC Gamer* is disgusting."

"What is wrong with game companies today? After seeing the August cover of your magazine, I wondered why you resort to sex to inspire young males with little to no social life outside of computing to purchase their games."

"I just got your latest issue, the best cover I've ever seen! Keep up the good work, guys!"

"Well, you managed to outdo yourselves this month! That cover with Lara Croft instantly became my favorite."

"I really don't care to see Lara Croft at all. She's just a character from a game and shouldn't pose for such a picture. It just is offensive to put her, and espe-cially that picture, on the cover for everyone to see. What does that say for your magazine? The magazine isn't *Playboy*, is it? All right then...."

"Hey, that's one great issue this month. Especially the cover. I was wondering if you could tell me where I can find the picture of Lara Croft you used?"

"I was disappointed when I saw the cover of your August issue. I real-ize how many games have used sex and attractive women to market toward this group. I think *RoboBabes: Metal and Lace*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Duke Nukem*, etc. However, this is no reason for your magazine to sink to their level."

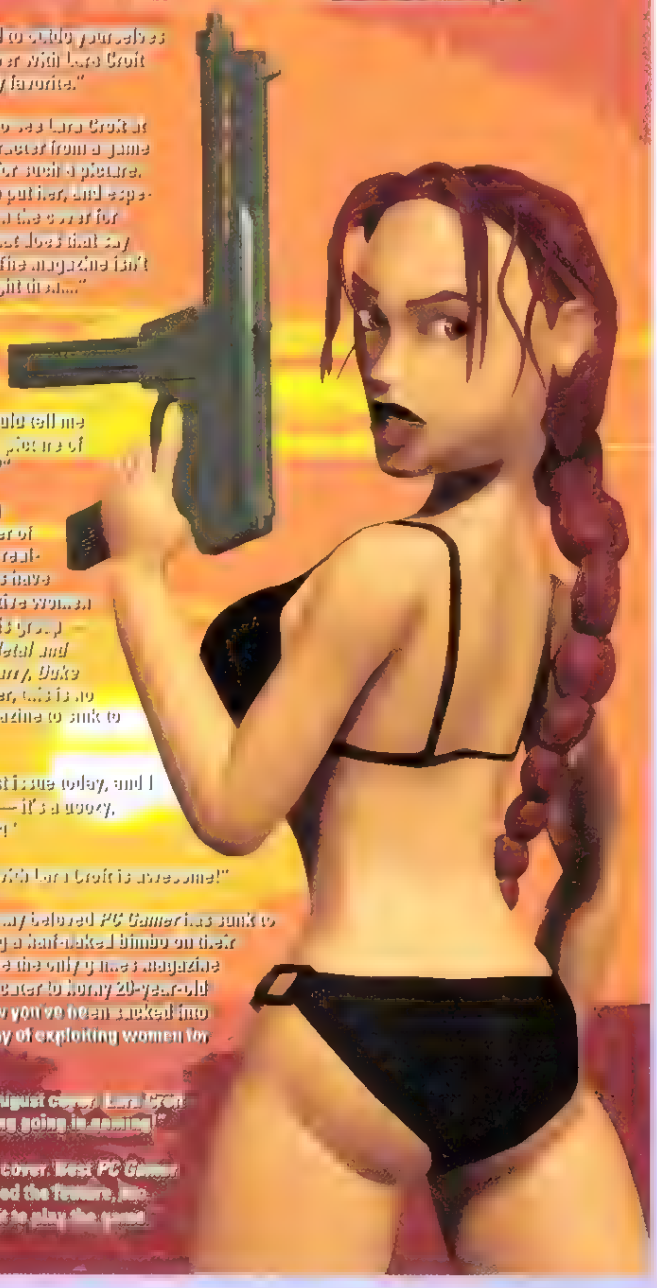
"I just got the August issue today, and I gotta hand it to you — it's a doozy, especially the cover!"

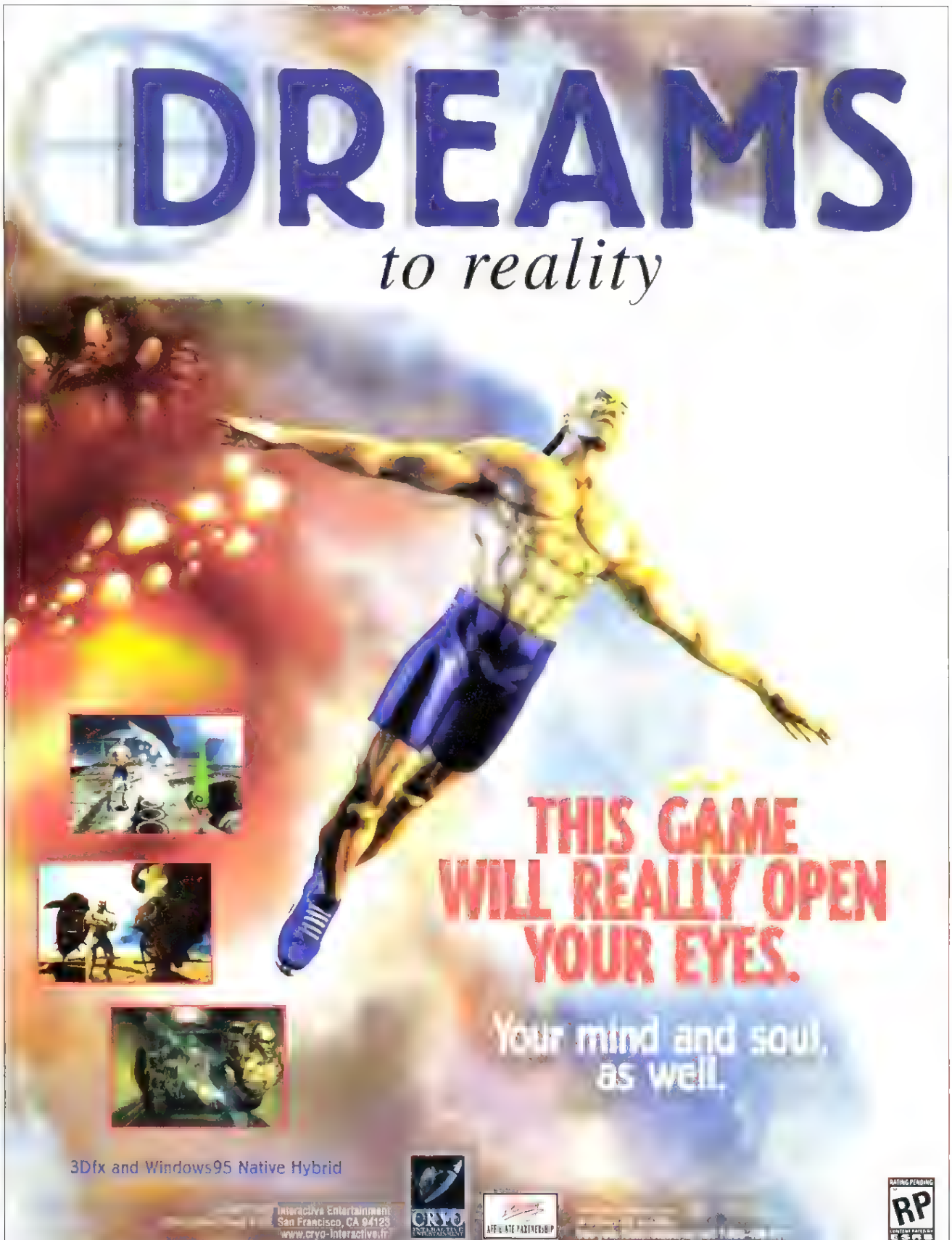
"The August cover with Lara Croft is awesome!"

"Well, it seems that my beloved *PC Gamer* has sunk to a new low by putting a half-naked bimbo on their cover. You used to be the only games magazine out there that didn't cater to horny 20-year-old men, but I guess now you've been sucked into the all-American way of exploiting women for financial gain."

"Thanks for the August cover. Lara Croft is the hottest thing going in gaming!"

"Re: Your Lara Cover. Best *PC Gamer* cover yet! I loved the feature, and now I can't wait to play the game."





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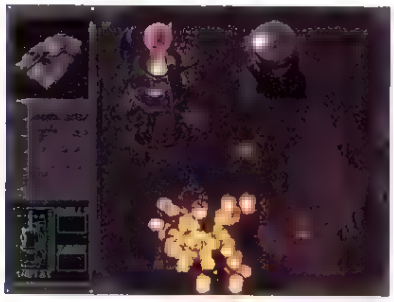

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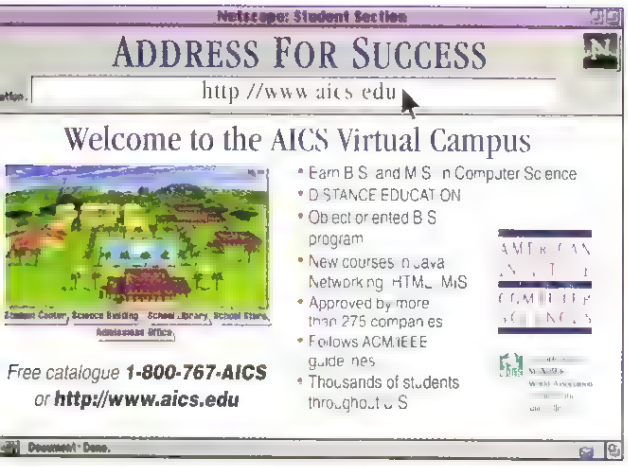
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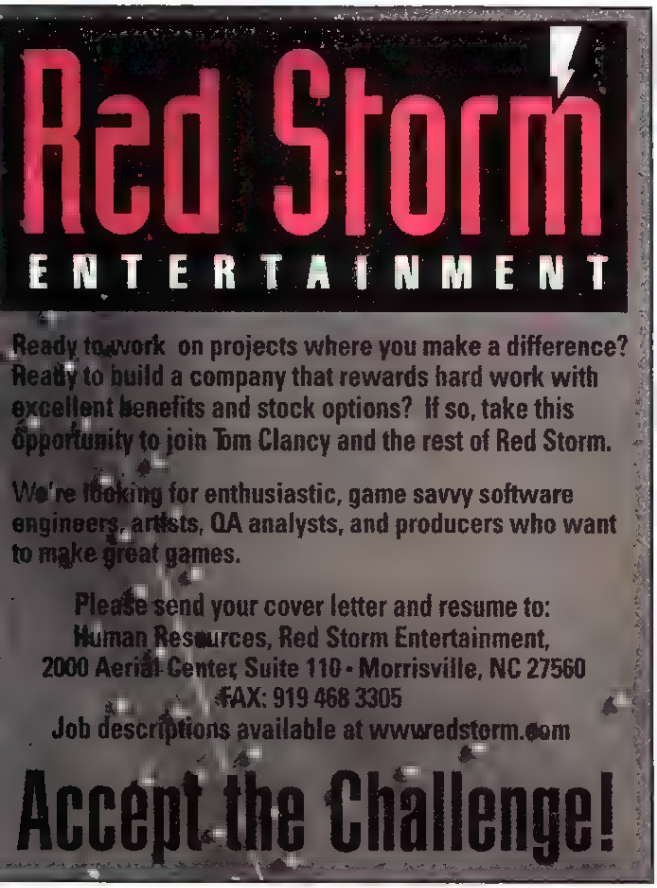
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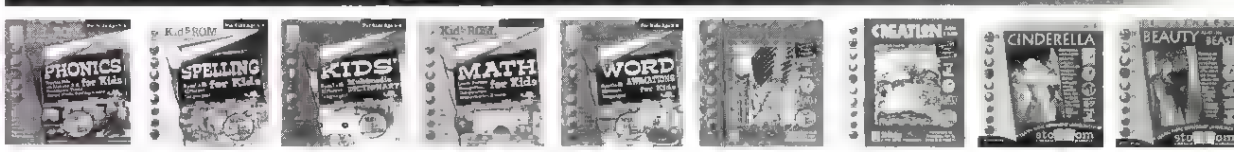

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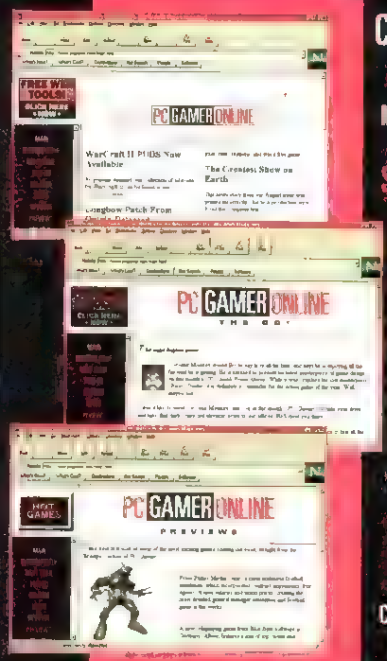

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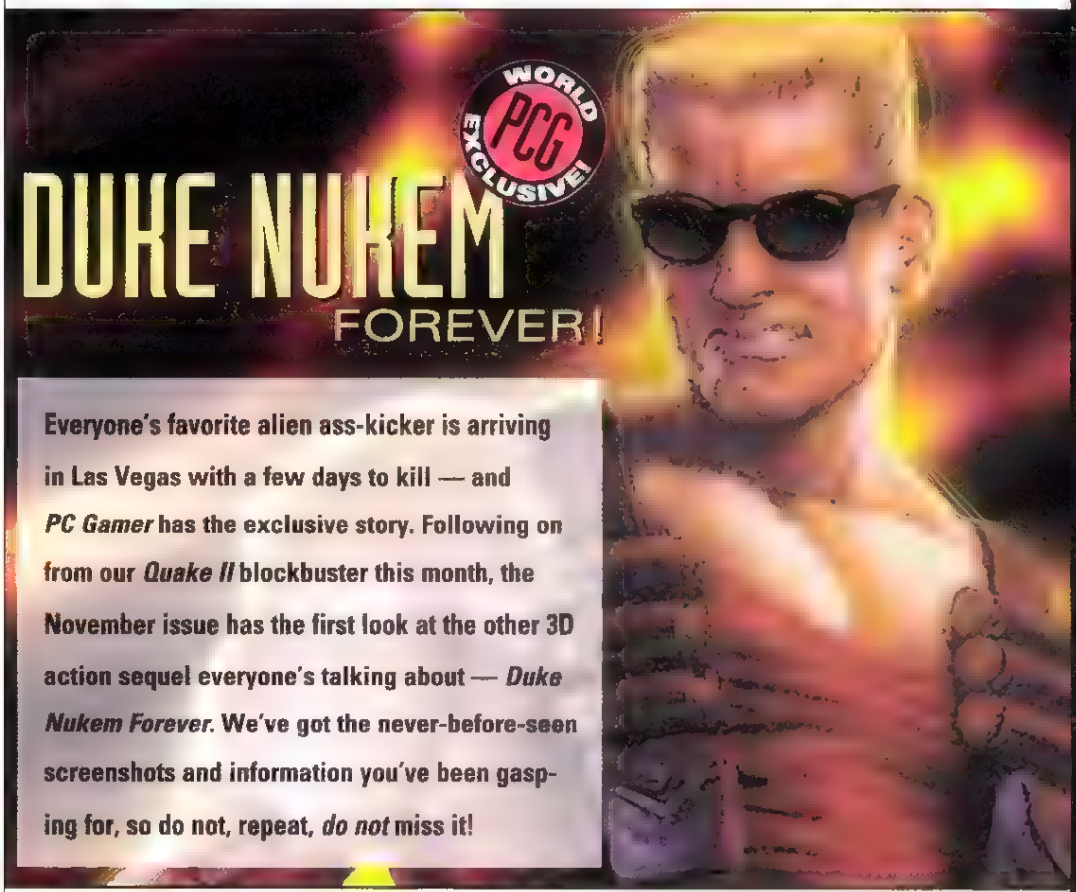
Product Information Number 152

NEXT TIME...

Vol. 4 No. 11 Goes On Sale Oct 21 Don't Miss It!

Woo-hoo! With summer finally behind us we can at last charge headlong towards the year's end, which as we all know is when the hottest PC games are slated for release. So expect a November issue even chunkier than this one to include such treats as...



Everyone's favorite alien ass-kicker is arriving in Las Vegas with a few days to kill — and *PC Gamer* has the exclusive story. Following on from our *Quake II* blockbuster this month, the November issue has the first look at the other 3D action sequel everyone's talking about — *Duke Nukem Forever*. We've got the never-before-seen screenshots and information you've been gasping for, so do not, repeat, *do not* miss it!

The New Originals

Jon Romero's Ion Storm. Peter Molyneux's Lion Head. Sid Meier's Firaxis. Chris Roberts' Digital Anvil. Four gaming geniuses, four new game companies — what can we expect from them? You'll find out next month as *PC Gamer* goes behind closed doors at these exciting startups

Hardware Special

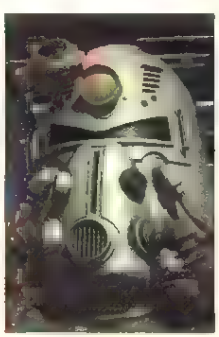
We'll be prying off that PC cover and delving deep inside your game machine's inner workings to bring you the definitive gaming upgrade guide — we'll have everything you need to know about how to turn your factory-set, innocent little home PC into a snarling beast of a game engine!

Plus!

The latest releases reviewed and rated, including...

- *Shadow Warrior*
- *SODA Off-Road Racing*
- *Fallout*
- *Starfleet Academy*
- *Dragon Dice*

...and many more!



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OCTOBER 1997

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Audit Bureau of Circulations

"My father is a respected member of the oil community in Texas," Susan said, looking at Jake over the top of her glass of water. "Do you know what that means, Jake?"

Jake stuttered out an answer. "That he has lots of money and lives on a ranch?"

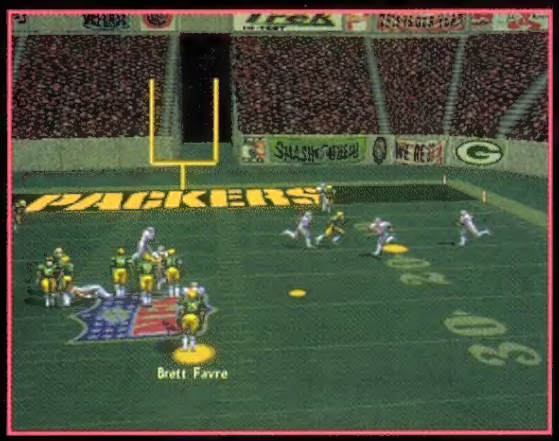
Susan smiled wryly. "No. It means that Marcus married me for my father's money. My father is quite sick, and once he's out of the way, I will inherit his fortune."

"So Marcus hired me to bump off your old man and then take you out, is that what you're saying?" Jake asked.

"Of course," Susan answered. "There really isn't any other logical explanation for why you've been following me, listening in on my phone conversations, accidentally bumping in to me at bars..."

Jake finally broke in to a wide smile. "You don't even know the half of it, Susan."

TO BE CONTINUED...



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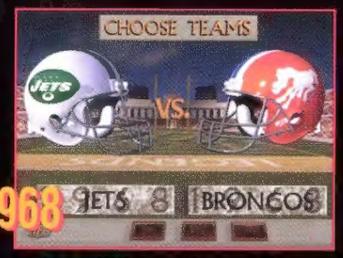
- "Time Travel" with teams to create fantasy matchups
- Action and Coach Mode play

1932

- 20-man rosters require most of your players to play both offense and defense. Get ready to use Dan Marino as a defensive back or Junior Seau at running back!
- The football is larger and harder to throw. Do you take a chance on the pass or grind it out with a running attack?



1968

- Play a little rougher on the receivers. You can hit them anywhere on the field until the ball is thrown...and it's all legal!
- Players like Dick Butkus ruled the gridiron, paving the way for the modern-day player.

1950

- Rules favor the running game.
- Goal posts were placed in the front of the end zone. The "Post" pattern was commonly used to run defenders into the posts for an easy touch-down reception.

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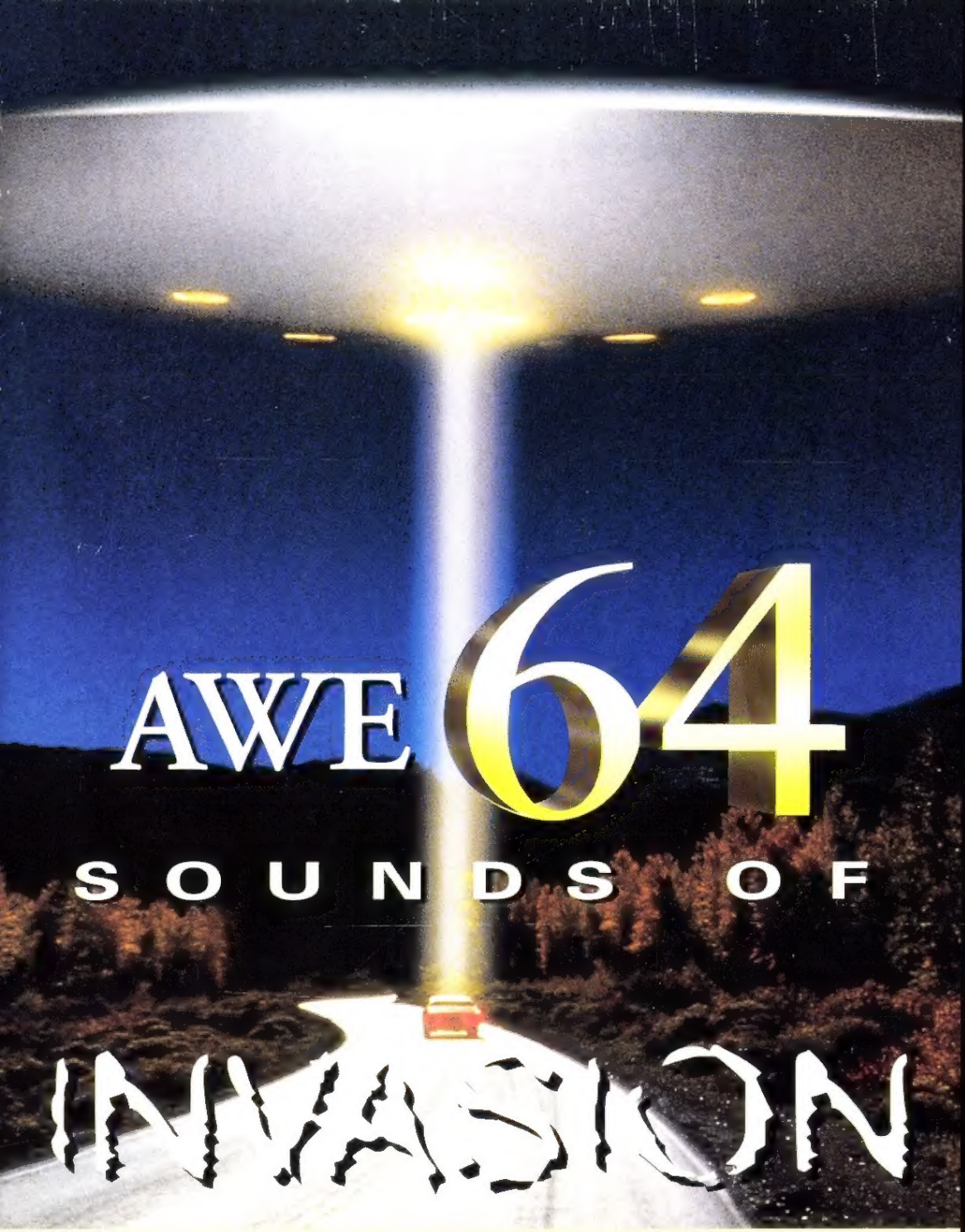

1. "We Come In Peace."
2. Blasting Ray Guns.
3. People Screaming.
4. "You Must Believe Me!"
5. Exploding Buildings.
6. Whirring Space Ships.
7. Brains Being Sucked.
8. Bones Crunching.
9. Aliens Phoning Home.
10. Metallic Scraping.
11. Cars Crashing.
12. Kidneys Bursting.
13. Insertion of Probes.
14. Heads Exploding.
15. "Run for Cover!"
16. "Warning."
17. Aliens Melting.
18. Pods Hatching.
19. Destroying the Monster.
20. Buildings Imploding.
21. Spaceships Docking.
22. Boiling Flesh.
23. "Mayday, Mayday!"
24. Exploding Spaceship.
25. People Running.
26. "I saw a UFO!"
27. Planes Taking Off.
28. "We're at DefCon 4."
29. Aliens Communicating.
30. Children Crying.
31. Slurp.
32. Clinking of Autopsy Instruments.
33. Laser Swords Crashing.
34. "Hyperspace!"
35. Flesh Being Torn Off Bones.
36. "They're Coming."
37. Wailing Sirens.
38. "You Must Die."
39. "Beam Me Up."
40. Zap!!!
41. Air Locks Closing.
42. "Oh, My God!"
43. Lasers Charging Up.
44. "We Need More Power!"
45. Ray Guns Blasting.
46. Calling the Mothership.
47. Horns Blaring.
48. "We Won!"
49. "Lock on Target!"
50. Crystals Charging.
51. Area 51 Guard: "No Admittance."
52. Zap-Zap!
53. Warning Alarms.
54. Air Locks Opening.
55. "Set to Stun!"
56. "Red Alert!"
57. Shields Up.
58. Warp Speed.
59. "Blast 'em!"
60. Eyeballs Squishing.
61. Spaceships Cloaking.
62. Radar Ping.
63. "Fire at Will!"
64. "Take Me to Your Leader."

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